Contemporary Artists from the Circumpolar Region

Aslaug Juliussen

and

Ronald W. Senungetuk

Charis Ann Gullickson

Master's Thesis in Art History

University of Tromsø, June 2006

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Cover Photo: Aslaug Juliussen, *Metamorfose* (detail), 2000
Photo: Charis Gullickson, 19.04.05

This is what we have to do. We have to look beyond the horizon because when you look into the horizon, you think that it is the end, but it is not. You walk to that horizon again and there is another horizon. You can go all the way around the world in this manner. If we can look at it that way, we will be better off. Otherwise, we will get too caught up in one simple thing, or one matter, or one problem. We have got to look at it from all angles.

Robert Mulluk, Iñupiaq (1984)

Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study investigating contemporary circumpolar art, with main focus on the Norwegian artist Aslaug Juliussen and the Alaskan artist Ronald W. Senungetuk. Both artists are Indigenous people, yet neither of them has a preference of being identified as Indigenous artists. In analyzing six artworks, three by each artist, the ambivalent nature of the "Indigenous label" will be examined. This study will show that it is difficult, in terms of an art historical perspective, to situate their art.

Are categories such as Sámi or Alaska Native art misleading in terms of contemporary circumpolar art terminology? Does Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art reflect a common trend in contemporary circumpolar art? In a globalizing world, the term "Indigenous art" seems to be an all-inclusive term, which attempts to describe an entire group of very diverse artists. There seems to be a tendency to equate "Indigenous art" with handicraft. Both Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art defies this stereotype. Their art is remarkable because it breaks boundaries.

In order to formulate a new approach to understanding contemporary circumpolar art, modern art theory will be employed, concentrating on the writings of the American theorists George Dickie and Arthur C. Danto. Their theories will accomplish two things. Firstly, determine where Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art can be positioned in regard to an art historical context. Secondly, explain how Juliussen's use of non-modified objects can be understood as art.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to thank the artists. This project would not have been accomplished without the help of Aslaug Juliussen and Ronald W. Senungetuk. Both donated time from their busy schedules to partake in my interviews and answer phone calls and emails. It was an honor to be a visitor in their homes and studios.

I would also like to thank the University of Tromsø, Interlibrary Loan and especially my supervisor Svein Aamold, who was persistent in providing me with encouragement and motivation. He inspired me to think critically and work hard. Thanks also goes out to my teacher Hege Olaussen and my fellow art history master students, who attended our seminars with new ideas and open minds.

Thank you to Eivind Brodal, Stein Olav Skrøvseth and Veronika Kristine Tømmerås for offering support when I felt like giving in. Thank you, Jude Baldwin and Kathy Hertel (from the Anchorage Museum of History of Art) and Irene Snarby (curator at *De Samiske Samlinger* in Karasjok, Norway) for helping me with my field research. Last but not least, thank you mom, dad, brother, Else Mønnesland, Eyolf Brodal and Burre.

It has been a great opportunity to study at the most northern university in the world! It is also incredible to live in Tromsø, which has officially been a sister city (friendship town) to my hometown Anchorage since 1969.

This project has been challenging, intense and exciting. I am so fortunate to have had the chance to study two amazing artists. In writing this paper, I hope I have raised new questions, and in doing so, inspired further research within the field of contemporary circumpolar art. I encourage everyone to get out and see their art!

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation is a cross-cultural comparison of contemporary circumpolar art from Alaska and Norway. Two artists have been selected for this investigation, the Norwegian artist Aslaug Juliussen, and the Alaskan artist Ronald W. Senungetuk. Both artists incorporate unique materials/imagery in their art and have ties to different Indigenous cultures. Juliussen is a Sámi reindeer herder, while Senungetuk is Iñupiaq and a retired professor.

Despite being bicultural as artists, influenced by regional and international developments in art, neither Juliussen nor Senungetuk are partial to being recognized as Indigenous artists.[1] I want to uncover why this is. Rather than making a quick or hasty assumption, I want to investigate the ambivalent nature of the "Indigenous label" and question if it is an appropriate term to use when identifying their art. If we instead refer to their art as "global art," are we erasing possible ties to Indigenous culture? Perhaps there is a tendency to associate Indigenous art with handicrafts. In order to reach a conclusion, I will analyze the art itself, contemplate the artists' own words, consider other critics' interpretations and apply art theory.

As representatives of their respective Indigenous cultures, perhaps people anticipate that their art conveys something uniquely or authentically Native. Contemporary Native American artist Jimmie Durham once wrote:

> *One of the most terrible aspects of our situation today is that none of us feel that we are real authentic. We do not think that we are real Indians. But each of us carries this 'dark secret' in his heart, and we never speak about it* […]. *The stereotype says to us that an Indian is a person who does and thinks certain things, within a very well-defined parameter that is like the wall around the Garden of Eden. When we deliberately break out of that, we usually must do so belligerently, to hide our fears. For the most part, we feel guilty, and try to measure up to the white man's definition of ourselves*.[2]

Possibly Juliussen and Senungetuk feel a similar pressure from society at large. Is this revealed in their art? Can this explain why an institution would prefer artwork from an artist with an Indigenous background?

I have selected six different artworks to investigate, three by each artist. All of them are public pieces located either in Alaska or Norway. Some are displayed in Sámi or Alaska Native institutions, while others are not. Here I will consider a number of different

[1] Juliussen, interview with the author, 19.04.05; Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05
[2] Durham 1983, p. 84

factors, for example: composition, use of material, context (where the artworks are located), the art's relationship to the space, the artist's insight and the viewer's perception. I hope to determine where their art, from an art historical perspective, is best situated.

Little has been written on contemporary Indigenous circumpolar art, neither Alaska Native nor Sámi art. Literature on Sámi art is typically in Norwegian, sometimes providing a summary in English. Thus, having confidence in Norwegian was an advantage in terms of my research. For example, it allowed me to conduct my interview with Juliussen in her native language. Many of the quotes referred to in this dissertation are from Norwegian sources, and I have tried my best in translating them all into English. By writing in English, I hope to convey my findings to the attention of a wider audience.

It has proven difficult to formulate an approach in which to analyze the artworks. I have not been able to find one specific theorist or theory that can be conveniently installed as a remedy for any misunderstandings or misconceptions of their art. In the past, Said's theory of "Orientalism" has been used to discuss contemporary Indigenous art.[3] Critics have often focused on the Western tendency to position "ethnic" arts outside the discussion of the modern experience.[4] Said's theory will be mentioned in order to devise an approach to Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art. The different approaches to regional art, as conceived by the Norwegian art historian Eli Høydalsnes will also be discussed. In hopes to avoid a reiteration of myths, my aim is to investigate Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art in an innovative way, by means of modern art theory. I will concentrate on the institutional theory of art, specifically literature written by George Dickie and Arthur C. Danto. Their theories might help to explain why contemporary Indigenous art may be called global. They may also clarify why Juliussen's use of unmodified materials is recognized as art.

Due to the lack of literature on these artists, my research has included a wide range of sources. My findings are based upon the artists' own words, my background in art history, my own intuition and of course the art itself. I have interviewed Juliussen and Senungetuk at their residences/studios. In order to stimulate a dialogue, I posed relatively similar open-ended questions to each artist. As a result, both interviews led in different directions. This difference also accounts for what specific background information I believe is necessary to consider in order to understand and fully appreciate their artworks.

[3] Said *Orientalism,* 1978
[4] Fisher 1992, p. 44

As a consequence, the biographical information that I have provided about them is somewhat different.

As the majority of their artworks are not documented, I spent time traveling in both Norway and Alaska taking photos and recording information, not only of the artworks held in my discussion, but many others as well. Summer 2005, I was granted an internship position in the archives/library at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, where I conducted a large extent of my research on Alaska Native art. I have also researched a number of different contemporary Indigenous circumpolar art exhibit catalogues and attended exhibits. At these exhibits I gained general knowledge of the art by speaking with curators. In this study, I will be focus on four specific exhibits, and examine their different agendas. Clearly, Indigenous groups around the world are related on the basis of political reasons such as colonization, oppression, war, violence, murder and loss of land ownership. Yet an interesting question one may ask is, can we compare their art? Perhaps Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art reflects a common trend occurring in contemporary circumpolar art. In order to find out, the scope will be widened, by discussing art by other contemporary circumpolar artists. Hopefully this will demonstrate the complex and ambivalent disposition of contemporary Indigenous circumpolar art. My presumption is that general terms such as Sámi artist or Alaska Native artist act as labels and confine contemporary artists into one single group.

Definitions

Throughout this dissertation, a number of central terms arise, such as *mainstream*, *global*, *Indigenous*, *ethnic*, *primitive* and *Native*. I believe that they deserve an explanation. Many of these terms have impending negative connotations or stereotypes, again emphasizing why they should be more carefully examined. Hopefully this will relieve any misunderstanding the reader may encounter.

Mainstream art is a term which Senungetuk has used to differentiate between conventional versus Alaska Native art. Essentially this term is used to make a distinction between Native and non-Native art. The term mainstream itself seems very broad. It has been defined as "the main or most widely accepted way of thinking or acting in relation to a subject."[5] Thus anything different or atypical of the norm qualifies as non-mainstream, one example is the term Indigenous art. Here Western art history is recognized as the

[5] *The Dictionary of English Language and Culture* 1993, p. 801

norm. Many writers seem to assume that the concept of mainstream art is so broad that it does not need any further explanation. Critics often use the word freely, without any explanation of its implied meaning. Mainstream art may be an all-encompassing term, but I believe its meaning slightly alters depending on which context it is used in.

Once the term mainstream has been used to distinguish between non-Native art and Native art, one has to clarify the differences between the following terms: *ethnic*, *Indigenous*, *primitive* and *Native*. Can these terms be used interchangeably? Rasheed Araeen claims that in theory "Orientalism" and "primitivism" should easily replace one another since primitivism was a term applied to all non-European cultures up until the end of the nineteenth century. Although at present, Orientalism has certain boundaries whereas primitivism refers exclusively to African/Oceanic cultures.[6] Although all are related on a certain level, each carries different associations. Caution should therefore be observed if one chooses to substitute any of these words

Indigenous is the term I mention the most throughout this investigation. I prefer this term because it seems to have less baggage and fewer negative connotations, in comparison to other terms, such as ethnic or primitive. By the way, using the term Indigenous also makes it easier when discussing Juliussen and Senungetuk concurrently, instead of writing both Sámi and Alaska Native culture. Furthermore the term often appears in contemporary art literature. One negative aspect of the term, however, is its all-inclusiveness, a sort of blanket term used to describe all aboriginal groups living worldwide. Basically it refers to people or things that have "always" been in the same place, rather than being brought from somewhere else.[7] The International Labour Organization convention No. 169 defines Indigenous peoples as:

> *Peoples in independent countries who are regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions*.[8]

Each world region has its own term to describe the original people from that place, such as Sámi or Alaska Native.

At first I thought the term "ethnic arts" was a relatively dated term. According to Rasheed Araeen, however, it is a new kind of primitivism in disguise, a nicer way to say

[6] Araeen 1991, p. 167
[7] *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* 2003, p. 828
[8] http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C169, 05.02.06

"other." The term did not emerge overnight, but surfaced in part with neo-colonialism. The concept of "ethnic arts" was first suggested by Naseem Khan in her book *The Art Britain Ignores* (1976).[9] Fundamentally, the underlying idea of ethnic arts is to describe a difference. Instead of being a positive factor, difference is understood as something lesser and inferior. This is characterized as ethnocentricity, the idea that your own race, nation or group is better than any other. *Ethnic* is defined as "someone who comes from a group of people who are of a different race, religion or have a different background from most people in that country."[10] The term ethnic does not appear in my discussion that often, since it does not mention or make reference to the individual group originally being from that place. While the terms Indigenous and Native do.

The term *Native* is a synonym for Indigenous. The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* states that, "Native (usually plural) is not polite, but a word used by white people in the past to refer to the people who lived in America, Africa, southern Asia, etc. before European people arrived, and is now considered offensive." However, in the U.S. today, the term Native is recognized as non-offensive, and the terms "Alaska Native" and "Native American" are commonly referred to.

Background Information

In order to establish a context for my discussion, I will provide a brief overview of Alaska Natives and the Sámi. Afterwards, I will give a concise outline of traditional versus contemporary Indigenous art. All of this information is a relevant backdrop for my discussion of Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art.

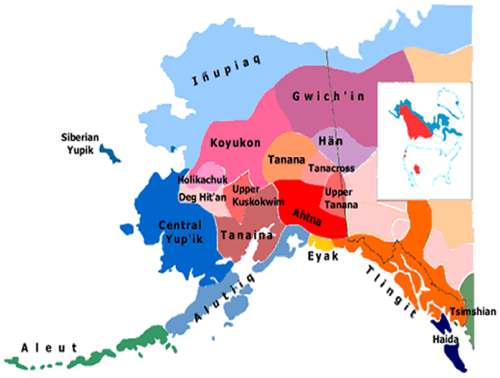

Figure 1: Map of Alaska showing the different groups of Alaska Natives. The various shades of red illustrate where the Athabascans traditionally come from.

Alaska Natives

Alaska Natives are Alaska's Indigenous people, which can be divided into eleven different cultures, speaking twenty different languages (see fig. 1). Of Alaska's 626,000 residents, Alaska Natives altogether represent sixteen percent of the population. The five

[9] Araeen 1991, p. 159
[10] *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* 2003, p. 533

major groups are: Athabascans (Interior Indians), Yup'ik and Cup'ik (Bering Sea Eskimos), Iñupiat, and Siberian Yup'ik (Northern Eskimos), Aleut/Unangan, Alutiiq/ Sugpiaq (Pacific Eskimos), and Eyak, Tlingit Haida and Tsimshian (Southeast Coastal Indians).[11] There are approximately 13,500 Iñupiat living in Alaska today, of whom about 3,000, mostly over age 40, speak the language.[12]

Perhaps the word Eskimo comes to mind, when one thinks of Alaska Natives. Nowadays however, the term Eskimo is often considered a derogatory term meaning "eater of raw meat." It is a term non-Natives assigned to the Iñupiat people.[13] This word fails to subdivide a large group of people by encompassing a number of different groups: the Inuit, Iñupiat, Sugpiaq/Alutiiq and Yup'ik people of the world.[14] Today, these people (at least the greater majority) prefer to be called Iñupiat. Senungetuk employs this term as well. The word Iñupiaq means "real or genuine person."[15] It has also been interpreted as "the people."[16] Senungetuk explains that when he visits his hometown, Wales, Alaska, he still meets people living there who have not caught on that it is a derogatory term. While he says "I am Iñupiaq," they say that they are Eskimo.[17] Perhaps the political correctness does not surface until one is distanced from the Native culture.

There is a large misconception surrounding the spelling of the word Iñupiat, which ends with either a "t" or "q." Essentially, Iñupiat is plural while Iñupiaq is singular. In addition to this confusion, in recent years, attempts have been made to more accurately spell Alaska Native words in English. Therefore, throughout my research I have come across the word Iñupiat written both with and without a tilde over the "n."[18] I have chosen to include the tilde, as I have included the accent mark when writing Sámi. I hope that this will help liken the pronunciation with the Iñupiaq language.

The Sámi

The Sámi are Indigenous people living in Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia (see fig. 2). Today the Sámi population is approximately 40,000 to

[11] Langdon 2002, p. 4 and http://www.alaskanative.net/2.asp, 04.04.06
[12] http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/langs/i.html, 04.04.06
[13] http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/inuitoreskimo.html, 22.08.05
[14] Inuit, similar to Alaska's term Iñupiat is the Canadian/Greenlandic term for people living in this Arctic region.
[15] http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/langs/i.html, 04.04.06
[16] Ray 1996, p. xix
[17] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05
[18] See for example: Chance 1990

60,000 people; about half of the population lives in Norway.[19] There are ten main Sámi dialects, which can nearly be viewed as different languages.[20] Similar to the Iñupiat being called Eskimos, the assigned term for the Sámi was Lapps. By the end of the seventeenth century however, it was known that the Sámi did not like being called Lapps, as it has derogatory connotations meaning "a person driven away or run away from his land, a name given to them by the Finns, who drove them to the north."[21] In spite of this, it was not until two hundred and fifty years later that they were referred to as Sámi. In 1945, Norway started using the word "Same" (Norwegian spelling) in official documents.[22] Sámi is the name they have given themselves and is written in their own language.[23]

Figure 2: Sápmi: A cultural region traditionally inhabited by the Sámi people.

In English literature, non-Sámi and Sámi writers alike have spelled the word "Sámi" in a number of different ways, often the versions "Saami" or "Same" have been used. Even though words in English do not typically employ accents, I believe that using the version from the Sámi language shows respect and helps to indicate emphasized pronunciation.

Minority Cultures

The Sámi and Alaska Natives are both groups of people that originally inhabited the lands now incorporated into the confines of Western nations. They are both minority groups that were overtaken by a majority population. Becoming minorities in their own countries has had similarities affects on their religion, language, lifestyle, learning and politics.[24] The Sámi have been integrated with Norwegian culture for many years, while in Alaska, Western contact is a more recent development. From the twelfth century, and onwards, there has been frequent interaction between Norwegians and Sámi.[25] Yet approximately one hundred and fifty years ago, Western culture rolled into Alaska like a tsunami,

[19] Hætta 2002, p. 15
[20] Lehtola 2002, p. 11
[21] Zorgdrager 1999, p. 179
[22] Ibid
[23] Ludger Müller-Wille 2002 (Translator's Note)
[24] Blodgett 2006 (*Midnight Sun* catalogue), p. 1
[25] Zorgdrager 1999, p. 177

submerging cultures that had been settled in Alaska for over ten centuries.[26] Time of contact for the Iñupiat was from 1780-1840.[27] The subsistence-based lifestyles were interrupted by technological and material advancements, previously unknown to them. Artistic activity was used as a means to cope with identity crisis.

Christians did not tolerate pagan religions, thus the Sámi were forced to convert. They were also forced to shed their entire culture and language.[28] Christianization also bombarded Alaska Natives and largely affected imagery in Alaska Native art. According to Senungetuk, "pictorial pre-contact art was very basic. You did not hide anything. It showed for instance, a bird pooping, animals doing their thing. It was very frank. It did not have the Christian ideals to stop it."[29]

In an effort to avoid the repetition of myths, it is important to undermine the Western notion of Indigenous cultures as being pristine, unchanging and isolated (that is before Western contact). On the contrary, many Indigenous cultures have had outside contact for centuries. For example, the Greenland Vikings arrived in northeastern Canada, meeting the Innu people during the eleventh century. Contact between the Innu (Canada), Thule and Dorset Eskimo groups has been a common occurrence throughout the past 8,000 years, yet this rate of contact drastically increased when European nations began to take advantage of the rich natural resources of the Innu territory.[30] French, English and Basque fishermen and fur-traders first arrived in Labrador during the sixteenth century.[31] Exchanges through marriage, trade and warfare allowed minority cultures to adjust and adapt to the dominant culture. Indigenous cultures around the world in general have been forced to transform in the face of change.

In Norway, the term Norwegianization is used to describe the state of affairs of the Sámi during the latter half of the nineteenth century.[32] Norwegianization was a form of Norwegian nationalism combined with social-Darwinism, determined to assimilate and absorb the Sámi people into the Norwegian population. Norway sought to have one land and one people. The Sámi were seen as inferior people, both mentally and physically, and therefore needed to be "enlightened" by the "civilized" Norwegians. Before World War II, virtually everything written on Sámi culture was prescribed by outsiders, Sámi people

[26] Baechtel and Smith 14.08.05, p. D-6
[27] Langdon 2002, p. 4
[28] Zorgdrager 1999, p. 187
[29] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05
[30] Smith, Ward and Burke 2000, pp. 7-8
[31] Ibid., p. 8
[32] Zorgdrager 1999, p. 175

themselves could not voice their opinion. In the beginning, the Norwegians and the Sámi seemed to live in peace with each other. The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of growth for the non-Sámi farming communities in northern Troms and western Finnmark, due to the overpopulated valleys in southern Norway. The Sámi reindeer herds in this area were growing as well. Norwegian farmers were hasty and occupied land, in spite of its seasonal use by reindeer herders.[33] Consequently, the farmers did not appreciate the damage reindeer caused to their fields and haystacks. As more Norwegians moved north, conflict increased.

Subsequent to Norwegianization came renationalization. Norwegians decided that it was important to acknowledge and appreciate other cultures, which the Norwegian government tried to achieve through preservation. Even though a culture in some sense should be preserved, this does not mean that change cannot be encouraged, life always moves forward. Change within a culture should not be seen as a loss, but as something worthwhile. Thus the Sámi people began the struggle to reconstruct their ravaged cultural identities. Following contact with the southern settlers (farmers), it had to be decided what factors made up Sámi culture. In a sense, the culture had to be revived.

Modern Indigenous cultures exhibit changes and growth from tradition. Given that contemporary Western society has a general fascination with Indigenous cultures, it seems to romanticize them worldwide. Having nostalgia for the past, Western culture hopes that the "exotically" different parts of their culture will remain intact.

Traditional Versus Contemporary Art

There is a similar relationship between traditional and contemporary Alaska Native and Sámi art. Senungetuk divides Alaska Native art into three categories, pre-contact, post-contact (mainly commercial art) and art from the last twenty-five years. Sámi art is divided into two main categories: *duodji* and *dáidda.*

Traditional Alaska Native art has ties with handicraft, not fine art. We know this by investigating the Alaska Native languages. Out of the twenty different Alaska Native languages, none of them have an equivalent word for art (in the Western sense). In Iñupiaq, the closest term for art is *suna* (pronounced, son-ah), which means "to make." It also connotes skill, craft and technique. Senungetuk defines traditional art as a "generation to generation activity, where sometimes [there has been] 2,000 years of

[33] Zorgdrager 1999, p. 183

evolution and it has proven itself pretty okay to keep yourself warm or to provide you with food if it was a weapon."[34] Many objects were decorated items for daily living made from ivory, wood and baleen.[35] In Nome, Alaska, the older generation of ivory carvers referred to their work as *sunauaq*, which means "to pretentiously make," not a way to make a living. Yet before Western contact, the concept of *sunauaq* did not exist, even though *suna* activity was omnipresent creative expression was regarded as an inseparable part of life.[36] Yet at that time, creators of functional objects did not consider themselves artists. According to Senungetuk, the Iñupiat people were never the ones to self promote.[37] They were later designated as artists by non-Native people. In other words, one can say that the introduction of the role of artist in Alaska is equated with European contact and the arrival of a market economy.[38]

Suna's counterpart in Sámi art is *duodji*. The *Samisk Kunstnerleksikon* defines *duodji* as an exercise in handicrafts. The word *duodji* implies everything from the oldest handicraft to today's beautiful, intricate works.[39] Similar to *suna*, knowledge is orally passed on to each new generation. *Duodji* is also marked by an ecological dimension, made from materials found in the local environment, for example reindeer hide, antlers and tendons, fish and bird skin, birch roots and outgrowths on birches.[40] Spoons, knife handles and sheaths, belt clasps, matchboxes and other household objects made of bone are often decorated with intricately engraved designs. Typically, the incisions are filled with a paste mixture of burnt birch bark, alder, bark, or snuff. The darker colored filling offers a nice contrast to the bone's white surface.[41]

In recent decades, approximately the past thirty years, a significant amount of Alaska Native art and Sámi art has broken ties with handicraft and developed into a modern form of expression. The Norwegian artist Hilde Skancke Pedersen writes,

> *Contemporary Sámi artists seek inwards, into their experiences, and they also seek beyond the limits of their Sáminess. Very many adopt a free position to their ethnical identity, whether they treat of it in their works or not. Many consider it a*

[34] Senungetuk quoted in Fair 1993, p. 13
[35] Senungetuk 2003, p. 3
[36] Traditional Alaska Native art has roots dating back more than two thousand years in the sculpture and decorative designs of the early cultures called Okvik, Old Bering Sea, Punuk, Ipiutak and Thule each with its own style. Ray 1996, p. 138
[37] Senungetuk, personal e-mail correspondence, 04.04.06
[38] Fair 1993, p. 15
[39] Marainen 2006, p. 6
[40] Ibid
[41] Ekström et al., 1983, p. 7

> *sufficiently great challenge to stand before a white canvas or paper, an unprocessed stone, raw fibres or the pixels of a display screen.*[42]

Certain contemporary artists are still deeply rooted in tradition. While others work independently from it, practicing in the Western understanding of art. Indigenous artists may also, to some extent, use their heritage as a source of inspiration. Such artworks are not easy to define because this type of artform is still in the process of definition, and in a stage of development. It is also difficult to locate a specific style within this wide ranging group of artworks. Jean Blodgett, a specialist in Canadian Inuit art writes: "One would be hard pressed to identify a 'Sámi art style' from this [contemporary Sámi art] disparate group of works."[43]

The role of contemporary art has also changed, becoming more philosophical and conceptually based. Irene Snarby outlines this transformation:

> *Early Sámi pictorial art had a tendency to underline and illustrate Sáminess, while today we see a more complex and multifaceted picture. Even if we can trace elements of ethnic affiliation in many works of art, an untrained eye will not necessarily see this. Elements from the artist's own cultural background are more veiled, and some artists may even feel a little uncomfortable about all the time facing expectations that their works will be about Sáminess. It is also evident that several artists are not only orientating themselves towards the European or Western pictorial tradition, but are also moving beyond this tradition, to enter into a dialogue with a global world.*[44]

As stated by Snarby, it is important to note that Indigenous artists living in a globalizing world, are not only influenced by Western art, but beyond.

Several Alaskan Native artists have attended universities outside (of Alaska) and are influenced by Western and international developments in art. According to Senungetuk, current Alaska Native art expression is "still drawn from various cultural backgrounds, but is freer both in terms of concepts and media usage."[45] As indicated by Senungetuk, Alaska Native artists have been able to join the mainstream art world through outside influences and by introduction to the "formal study of art."[46] Several Alaska Native artists use non-traditional media and explore new forms of artistic expression.

[42] Skancke Pedersen 2006, p. 12
[43] Blodgett quoted in Skancke Pedersen 2006, p. 14
[44] Snarby quoted in Skancke Pedersen 2006, p. 14
[45] Senungetuk 2005, p. 3
[46] The Western concept of art

Traditional discussions of Sámi art are based upon an understanding of the art's development from *duodji.*[47] This trend began to change with the introduction of *dáidda* in the 1970s. The Sámi word *dáidda*, is a term that was introduced in order to satisfy a lack in the Sámi language. It is the equivalent to the concept of fine art. In other words, it is an activity which often has a source of folk art, but implements current forms of expression.[48] Before this time, a term did not exist to describe art in the northern European sense.[49] According to Morten Johan Svendsen, until recently, the concept of modernism in Sámi art has been viewed as a "trespasser" or "irrelevant." He credits the Norwegian Sámi artist Iver Jåks, as the "father of modernism" in Sámi art. I believe that Senungetuk has played a similar, if not greater, role within Alaska Native art.

[47] Svendsen 2002, p. 148
[48] Persen 1993, p. 4
[49] Dunfjeld 2002, p. 68

Chapter 2: Two Artists and Six Works

Aslaug Juliussen

> *It appears that, in any given country, the artist-role gives one the freedom of expression. In this role we can break boundaries and tell new stories, by seeing society from another perspective. This is the freedom I take advantage of.*
>
> - Aslaug Juliussen[1]

For the past twenty years, Aslaug Juliussen has been engaged with reindeer herding. She has worked as an artist since 1982.[2] Juliussen and her family perform the same seasonal rituals, from spring and winter herding to calf marking and fall butchering. They are constantly moving around in the natural landscape with the reindeer. This rhythm of life is the primary inspiration for her art. It is in this process that ideas are born. Dealing with reindeer in Finnmark (previously in Kautekeino and currently in Karasjok) has given Juliussen a vast amount of resource for her art. This resource is medium as well as conceptually based. Organic materials seem to be an important ingredient. Juliussen cuts, sorts and cleans (by boiling) all of the reindeer remains that are used in her art. She virtually employs every part of the animal: hooves, fur, stomachs, intestines, teeth, bone and antler. She even makes her own glue by melting the reindeer skin in warm water, following an ancient painting technique.[3] In Karasjok, the butchering and flaying of reindeer is an everyday occurrence, most people do not think twice about it. The meat is eaten and the skin is removed to make warm and beautiful clothing. Juliussen wants to express the beauty of the reindeer remains, of which most people are unaware of.

Juliussen was born in 1953 in Lødingen, Norway. Due to the fact that she was raised in a non-Sámi area, has created some controversy. As to whether or not she is a true Sámi.[4] She responds to these reactions by saying, "[…] it would be wrong to say that I am not Sámi."[5] Today however, there is no doubt that her lifestyle reflects the identity of a Sámi. Juliussen met her husband John Henrik while she was studying at Statens Håndverks- og Kunstindustriskole (SHKS) in Oslo from 1976-80. John Henrik was raised in Karasjok, where his family members were Sámi reindeer herders. He was studying

[1] Juliussen, interview with the author, 19.04.05
[2] Juliussen 16.04.05
[3] Painters use this glue to prepare their canvases so that the paint is not absorbed by the textile material.
[4] Juliussen, interview with the author, 19.04.05
[5] Ibid

linguistics in Oslo when he met Juliussen. After his father retired, he and Juliussen decided to move north and take over the family's reindeer business. Perhaps one could argue that Juliussen's "Sámi identity" became more distinct at this point. Yet how does one define who is Sámi? Is it based on place of residence, lifestyle, language or genetics? Genetically, Juliussen qualifies as Sámi based on her inheritance from her father, who is from the Karasjok area. She is also a registered Sámi and therefore votes in the Sámi Parliament elections.[6] The argument of deciding who is Sámi seems to arise more frequently, than determining who is Alaska Native in Alaska. Perhaps this is because Western contact occurred more recently in Alaska than it did in Norway. One soon realizes how complicated the discussion of who is a Sámi actually is. Now try to clarify what Sámi art is! Irene Snarby writes, "One is actually tempted to avoid the entire argument altogether and say that a specific Sámi visual arts does not exist."[7]

Some people in the Sámi community are apprehensive towards Juliussen's non-traditional handling of reindeer remains. Reindeer is often associated with traditional Sámi handicraft, *duodji.* Even though Juliussen works with reindeer remains, does not necessarily mean that her art is related to handicraft. She uses the reindeer parts to tell her own story. In spite of this, individuals from the Sámi community have approached Juliussen asking her if she has a right to use the reindeer remains in this way. She does not surrender to this criticism, her response is: "Yes, I have a right […] these are my animals. I am fifty years old and I do what I want, I do not ask anyone."[8]

Sámi art and culture is often associated with political correctness, which has never been a part of Juliussen's agenda. She is insistent on taking advantage of the freedom that artistic activity allows. The political factor is important, but Juliussen does not believe that it should be linked to contemporary Sámi art. The American art theorist Thomas McEvilley claims that the true meaning of the acronym "PC" is not so much "politically correct," but "postcolonial." McEvilley believes that political correctness trivializes the development of postcolonialism.[9] Many Sámi artists during the 1970s became politically

[6] The current requirements for voting in the Sámi Parliament elections are as follows, either: 1) Sámi is the language spoken in the home, or 2) one has or has had parents, grandparents or great grandparents who spoke Sámi at home, or 3) one is a child of someone who is registered or has been registered as Sámi. Pamphlet from the Sámi Parliament: *Sametinget: Karasjok*, see also the Sámi Parliament's homepage, www.samediggi.no

[7] Snarby 1995, p. 6

[8] Juliussen, interview with the author, 19.04.05

[9] McEvilley 1992, pp. 130-31

active, forming their own group.[10] Perhaps this link between art and politics stuck after this period ended. Even today Sámi art remains a somewhat "touchy" subject.

Reception of Juliussen's artworks has varied on a local and international level. According to Juliussen, her exhibit titled *Aslaug Juliussen*, which was held in conjunction with "Festspillene i Nord-Norge" in 2001, received mixed reactions in Norway. To begin with, it was criticized by the Tromsø newspaper *Nordlys*. Juliussen says, "People were provoked, especially a journalist who thought it was awful that I would try to fool viewers into believing that reindeer remains were art."[11] Shortly thereafter she was invited to display her artworks at the *Triennale 2002* exhibition in Hamburg, Germany. Here Juliussen was met with praise and described as an interesting and creative artist. In general however, reception of Juliussen's art, within the northern Norwegian community, is positive. In 1999, after one of her first solo exhibitions titled *Dialoger I*, at the Sámi Artists' Center in Karasjok, she was approached by an older woman who had been a reindeer herder her entire life and was unfamiliar with modern art. The woman said, "I thought I had seen everything (dealing with reindeer), but I had not seen how beautiful it really is."[12] Juliussen explains that this kind of response (especially from someone within the Sámi community) gives her the motivation to continue creating art: "For those who cannot see beauty in my art, I cannot help, but if I convey this beauty (of the reindeer remains) to a select few, I am satisfied."[13]

Juliussen's artistic background is in fiber and textiles, which is something that has followed her throughout her entire artistic career. From 1980-82 she was an apprentice for the renowned Norwegian textile artist Synnøve Anker Aurdal in Oslo, Norway. She also studied at the Institute for Art Therapy in Odense, Denmark from 1996-97. In recent years however, her art has taken off from two-dimensional to three-dimensional works. Thus images of circles, a reoccurring symbol in her art, have transformed into spheres. Working in three dimensions has led Juliussen to focus more on location such as the

[10] In 1978, the Sámi Group of Artists was formed by the artists Aage Gaup, Trygve Lund Guttormsen, Josef Halse, Berit M. Hætta, Hans Ragnar Mathisen, Ranveig Persen and Synnøve Persen. After receiving an education, the artists returned to Sápmi, to Masi, to help save the Alta-Kautokeino River from being dammed. The group is responsible for initiating a considerable foundation of Sámi art recognition within the past twenty years. They held their first exhibition in 1979 at The Sámi Collections Museum (De Samiske Samlinger) (see p. 56), which led to the purchase of several artworks. Svendsen 2001 (Nr. 2), pp. 89-90

[11] Juliussen, interview with the author, 19.04.05

[12] Ibid

[13] Ibid

gallery space or room of installment. Her art has become a sort of installation.[14] Consider for example, the work titled *Triade* (1999) which she placed in the middle of the gallery floor so that it would interact with her other piece titled *Lagt seg spredt (Lávda livvon)* (1999) which was located on the gallery wall. *Triade* was an assemblage of three dried reindeer stomachs, which stood on three Plexiglas posts. While *Lagt seg spredt (Lávda livvon)* was a series of multiple linen spheres adjoined with antler/bone fragments.[15]

Juliussen considers the entire world a possible source of inspiration, reindeer remains are merely one aspect of her art. She claims that she is particularly inspired by other women artists, such as Louise Bourgeois (b.1911-), Marina Abramovic (b.1946-), Eva Hesse (b.1936- 1970), Jenny Holzer (b.1950-), Rebecca Horn (b.1944-), Shirin Neshat (b.1957), Helen Chadwick (b.1953-1996), Nicola Costantino (b.1964-), Kiki Smith (b.1954-), Francoise Quardon (b.1961-) and Sissel Bergh (b.1974-).[16] These artists come from all over the world and many of them, similar to Juliussen, employ animal remains and focus on the dualism of animal versus human.

According to Juliussen, another source of inspiration for her art is traveling. She claims that this has given her an understanding of other cultures and has also put her own life into perspective. On her travels she meets other artists and is exposed to new forms of artistic expression. Upon arriving home, she is a renewed person. Her experiences abroad extend far beyond the local Karasjok community. In January 2005 she visited southern India, where she became fascinated with Hinduism.[17]

Figure 3: Aslaug Juliussen In her studio, Karasjok, Norway 19.04.05

Juliussen has exhibited internationally, in Sweden, Finland, Germany, Russia and Iceland. Her art has been purchased all over Northern Norway and she has sold many pieces to permanent collections at both Sámi and Norwegian institutions.

[14] An installation is a construction or assemblage conceived for a specific interior, such as a gallery or museum, often for a temporary period. There is often a consideration of various elements, rather than one object. The term gained popularity in the 1960s, thus it is often associated with movements such as Pop art, Nouveau Réalisme, Minimalism, conceptual art and process art, but in theory it can reference nearly any style. http://www.groveart.com/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=266878325&hitnum=1&section=art.041385, 17.03.06

[15] Photographs of both of these works can be found in the catalogue *Aslaug Juliussen*, 2001.

[16] Juliussen 16.04.05

[17] Juliussen, interview with the author, 19.04.05

Metamorfose

Figure 4: Aslaug Juliussen, *Metamorfose*[18]

Year: 2000

Location: Sametinget (Sámediggi), Karasjok, Norway

Dimensions (approximately): width 400 cm (13') x height 25 cm (10") x depth 14 cm (6"). There is an equal distance of 13 cm (5") between each sphere. The piece is located approximately halfway between the floor and ceiling.

Media: Reindeer antler/bone, linen thread (bleached and unbleached) and metal mesh.

Metamorfose is located in a small conference room at the Sámi Parliament.[19] Of the three works by Juliussen in my discussion, *Metamorfose* is the only work housed at a Sámi institution. The Sámi Parliament building is amazing architecturally, and so is the history of how it became a reality.[20] Architecturally, the Sámi Parliament represents modern Sámi culture through an interplay of wood and steel. Materials, details and choice of color give the building a contemporary quality.[21] These materials represent a comprehensive project of melding modern and traditional aspects of Sámi culture. As part of this scheme, Juliussen's piece has major significance and reflects contemporary Sámi culture. This piece has an organic quality which successfully reflects the building's architecture and the surrounding forests of Karasjok. Although it has a modern form of expression, the work

[18] *Metamorfose* is the Norwegian word for metamorphosis

[19] Sametinget in English is The Sámi Parliament. Please note that in Norwegian, the word "the" is written after the noun *Sameting* as "*et*." Sámediggi is the Sámi word for the Sámi Parliament.

[20] In essence, the Sámi Parliament's opening in 1989 represented the realization of a vision that had been initiated long ago. Norway is a territory made up of two groups of peoples the Sámi and Norwegians. This explains why there is both the Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget) and the Sámi Parliament. The Sámi Parliament represents the political and legal status of the Sámi people. The last half of the 1800s and beginning of the 1900s marked a dark period in Sámi culture, where Sámi essentially had no rights. Increased conflict between Sámi reindeer herders and recent Norwegian settlers had created growing concerns within various Sámi communities. As a result, Sámi political organizations were established. The first national Sámi convention was held in Trondheim in 1917, and was a huge stride socially, politically and culturally for the Sámi people. In 1989, seventy-one years after the first convention, King Olav opened the first Sámi Parliament. In spite of this, the Sámi Parliament did not have a permanent location until 2000. Before this time space for the Sámi Parliament was rented from the municipality of Karasjok. See: Statsbygg 2000, pp. 6-15

[21] Ibid., p. 15

can still be associated with Sámi reindeer herding tradition. The building's premises embody a landscape of wild dwarf shrubs and moss, not a cultivated landscape. I believe that it extends outside of the building to the Karasjok community as well, where reindeer play an important role. Here Juliussen has managed to bring elements from the external world into this room.

Seventeen spheres of equal size are aligned horizontally adjacent to one another. Each sphere in *Metamorfose* extends into the viewer's space, as if beckoning attention. Almost eerily these spheres seem to levitate along the wall (see fig. 7). It is this sort of tension that immediately strikes and engages the viewer. A variety of shadows are reflected on the wall from the overhead artificial lighting. In addition, natural light streams in from the windows to the right of the piece. A fragment of either reindeer antler or bone is joined to the uppermost part of each sphere. Inside the core of each sphere is a cluster of metal mesh, which has been entirely covered with bleached or un-bleached linen string. Because the metal core is completely concealed, Juliussen has created the illusion that the entire sphere is composed of linen string. Layer upon layer of tightly wrapped linen string creates an intricate pattern. Juliussen's energy is bound up in the strings of the spheres; we can envision her hands wrapping the linen thread in an ever repetitive way.

The unique and individual features of the bone/antler fragments are heightened due to the extreme uniform appearance of the spheres, which are unvarying in design. While antler can have a harsh or rough surface, Juliussen renders smooth surfaces, resulting in a sensuous form of expression (see fig. 5). Juliussen deceives the viewer into believing that the white bone fragments are fragile, like pieces of porcelain.

Figure 5: *Metamorfose*, detail

Perhaps the muted colors of this piece, in comparison to bright colors, are less distracting and more appropriate for this conference room setting. These subdued colors contrast significantly with the brightly colored string in Juliussen's piece *Dust and Bones*

(I will later discuss this work), where Juliussen created a dialogue between vivid and subdued colors.

Metamorphosis is a word that describes changes observed in a physical form or in content, such as appearance, character, or condition. This word is often used when describing complete or marked change in animals when they develop into adults. Thus we can interpret this piece as the development of one individual antler/bone fragment, rather than a group of separate entities. The spheres seem to act as nurturers or cultivators that influence and enable the bone/antler fragment to grow. Paradoxically antler and bone are dead objects, yet here they seem to be in the process of growth. This establishes an interesting dualism between life and death. Bone has actually been associated as both a symbol of life and death, or resurrection.[22] In Tibet and India, human bones have been used to make sacred weapons and musical instruments, which surmount the notions of life and death and of access to immortality.[23] During life, bones act as a framework for the body and contain marrow, a sign of life. Upon death, bones are a relatively permanent element and represent resurrection. Similar to Alaska Native mythology, the Sámi believe that if the bones of a bear are carefully preserved, the animal will come to life again and allow itself to be hunted in the future. This is because the soul is believed to be kept in the bones.[24]

Figure 6: *Metamorfose*, detail

In *Metamorfose* we know the spheres are influential in the "fragment's" development because its color corresponds to that of the sphere. Thus the four white spheres are coupled with white bones, beige spheres with darker beige colored antler pieces, etc. Apart from four off-white colored spheres, made from bleached linen string, two located on each end, the spheres are composed of thin beige unbleached linen string. I believe that the off-white colored spheres represent a new beginning, marking the start of the bone's transformation. Due to symmetric layout of this piece, we can identify the transformation as cyclical. Regardless of where the path of transformation begins, it ends right where it started.

[22] Vries 1984, p. 58
[23] Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1994, p. 109
[24] Ibid., pp. 109-10

Juliussen's close bond and habitual routines with reindeer, plus the act of butchering allows her to accomplish two things. Firstly, it allows her to explore the dualism of life and death. Secondly, it reflects the cyclical theme of transformation in this piece. It is reflective of her rhythmical lifestyle of herding reindeer during the various seasons. While most people associate reindeer bone, antler and fur as images of death, Juliussen sees something else. Instead of perceiving death and entrails, we are possessed by an interest in natural form and texture. Through her art, Juliussen is successful in bringing forth an aesthetic appeal from raw materials where such beauty was previously concealed.

Metamorfose could have hung on a gallery or museum wall, but Juliussen specifically formulated it for this room. Rather than thinking in terms of a Sámi theme, Juliussen focused on the purpose of the Parliament and what activities take place there. It is an institution where Sámi politicians and bureaucrats have the power to decide how to define and manage society. In this meeting room, interaction takes place between individuals; ideas are formed, exchanged and put into action. I was curious as to what the committee's requirements were for the piece, did they request an artwork with a Sámi theme? Did they want something that would express the strength of the Sámi people? Surprisingly, Juliussen was not restricted to a Sámi theme; there were not any set boundaries for the project.[25] Juliussen was originally contacted by the decoration committee about commissioning a textile piece for this room. However she was against this idea, feeling that a textile did not agree with the room's ambiance or the overall function of the room. Once she suggested this idea, it was eagerly accepted by both the committee and the architect.[26]

Figure 7: ***Metamorfose***

[25] Juliussen, e-mail correspondence, 13.10.05
[26] Ibid

The New York sculptor and painter Eva Hesse, has comparable artworks to Juliussen. Consider for example, the piece *Addendum* from 1967 (see fig. 8). In Hesse's piece, seventeen uniform spheres (the same number as in *Metamorfose*) composed of papier-mâché align the wall adjacent to one another, occupying a length of 303 cm (120"), similar to the length of *Metamorfose*.[27] I found it astonishing that both artists represented seventeen spheres. Perhaps it is merely coincidence, but this number has symbolic significance in a number of different cultures. According to the Sufi alchemist Gabir ibn Hayyan, the number seventeen has a universal quality and the shape of all things in the world is seventeen. Furthermore, the number seventeen represents the very foundation of the theory of balance and should be regarded as the law of equilibrium in all things. One could perhaps speculate that the "universal" aspect of the number seventeen reinforces the idea of Juliussen's and Hesse's art as having a universal form of expression. Artist and gallerist Harald Bodøgaard, has described Juliussen's art as "presenting a global expression, which extends far beyond the local."[28] Through a combination of global and local elements, I believe that *Metamorfose* is a good example of this.

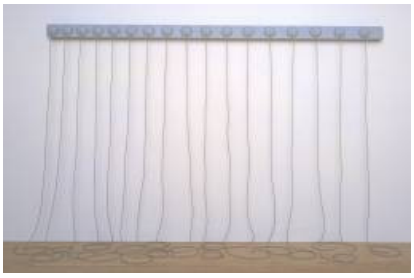

Figure 8: Eva Hesse, Addendum, 1967

In *Addendum,* the spheres are not whole, but half recessed into a long wooden plank that they are mounted to. Adjoined to each sphere are separate pieces of long cord, which drape onto the floor in circular patterns. The muted grayish/beige color of *Addendum* is literally identical to the colors depicted in *Metamorfose.* Hesse's art has been described as "powerfully tactile and suggestive, yet relied on an abstract formal language."[29] Hesse's art incorporated new materials (at that time) for instance rope, latex, rubberized cheesecloth, clay, metal and wire mesh. Such industrial materials were very resistant to the geometric and architectural ambitions of Minimalism.[30] Hesse's sensually organic forms seem similar to those found in Juliussen's art. Not to mention that Juliussen's works also appear extremely tactile. The viewer wants to touch the bristly membranes or the bone/antler protrusions.

[27] Baier 1992, p. 227
[28] Sætre 28.07.04
[29] Chadwick 2002, p. 348
[30] Ibid., p. 339

Both artists seem to create a kind of tension through a portrayal of contrasting materials, which creates an element of surprise, or a sense of Surrealism. Accordingly, conceptual dualisms such as life/death and internal/external emerge. Juliussen combined linen thread, something that is familiar and comforting for the viewer with bone, something unfamiliar and possibly having macabre associations. While both materials are "near" to the body, thread (cloth) is something that is worn on the exterior. Bone is normally concealed within the body and not customarily seen by the viewer. It is this type of tension the piece displays, which arouses the viewer's attention.

Horn'Portal

Figure 9: Aslaug Juliussen, *Horn'Portal*

Year: 2004

Location: City Hall, Tromsø, Norway[31]

Dimensions (approximately): height 300 cm (10') x width 60 cm (23") x length 940 cm (31') depth: background & objects 8-9 cm (3.1-3.5")

Media: iron/glass, antler/glass, crushed dolomite with glue/glass.[32] The glass tips are joined with MS-polymer glue. Photographs: laminated on 12 mm (.5") acrylic-glass

Background: wooden background painted with burnt umbra oil-based paint.

Horn'Portal adorns the executive committee room portal at the City Hall in Tromsø. This piece has a somewhat different visual form of expression than depicted in *Metamorfose.*

[31] The City Hall translated in Norwegian is *Rådhuset*.
[32] Dolomite is a common sedimentary rock-forming mineral.

Perhaps Juliussen felt that is was necessary to incorporate new materials and techniques, in order to reflect the function of the building. Similar to the *Metamorfose* commission, Juliussen was not given any restrictions in regard to theme. Yet she still chose to employ reindeer remains, even though the City Hall is a not a Sámi institution. Perhaps Juliussen believed that it was important to emphasize Sámi features, for example the use of reindeer remains, in such a public setting. The City Hall was a brand new building when this project was first initiated. As a result, Juliussen was presented with the architect's building plans. The building incorporates materials such as steel, glass, stone and light brown birch parquet.[33] Juliussen's idea was to take these materials and incorporate them into an individual form of expression, while at the same time focusing on their symbolic potential. There is a great deal of symbolism bound in *Horn'Portal.* Juliussen is very articulate in recording her thoughts on her art. She explained that she incorporated six symbolic meanings by using antler, glass, iron, stone, the circle and the number four.[34] The possible symbolic meanings of these media will be analyzed later.

Elements found in nature are continually present in Juliussen's art. *Horn'Portal* is no exception, it makes clear references to nature through an uncomplicated form of expression. Juliussen habitually uses objects directly from nature in her sculptural pieces. In *Metamorfose*, antler and linen thread are joined together. Here in *Horn'Portal*, she replicates themes from nature, rather than depicting them directly. It incorporates reindeer antler, which is one of Juliussen's trademarks. The other media used (listed on previous page) are unfamiliar to earlier works by Juliussen. In order to actualize her ideas of *Horn'Portal*, Juliussen had to work closely with glass artists, iron and stone casters, a photographer and a carpenter (all from northern Norway). *Horn'Portal* incorporates photographs, which have been laminated onto acrylic glass circles. These mounted photographs are glimpses from nature: water, stone, sky and the sun's reflection in water (see fig. 10).[35] Even though these images are scenes from nature, they appear very abstract. A viewer may actually not recognize what the photographs depict.

Figure 10: *Horn'Portal*, detail of center circle

Juliussen considers the circle as "one of the most important and widespread

[33] Juliussen 8.12.04
[34] Ibid
[35] Ibid

geometric symbols, with its form stemming from the image of the sun and the moon."[36] The circle has in fact symbolic significance in many different cultures:

> *Whether the symbol of the circle appears in primitive sun worship or modern religion, in myths or dreams, in the mandalas drawn by Tibetan monks, in the ground plans of cities, or in the spherical concepts of early astronomers, it always points to the single most vital aspect of life- its ultimate wholeness*.[37]

Dr. M.-L. von Franz has described the circle (or sphere) as a symbol of the Self.[38] The Swiss psychiatrist, and founder of Analytical Psychology, Carl Jung maintained that: "the symbol of the circle is an archetypal image of the totality of the psyche, symbol of the ego."[39] Even Plato described the psyche as a sphere.[40] I believe that in *Horn'Portal,* the circle represents a sign of life and fertility. It is an important part of the frieze of life, something that will be discussed later.

The iron and dolomite forms are one innovative aspect of this piece. Juliussen replicated antler fragments by casting them into iron and dolomite. Subsequently, the various fragments were joined with glass points on each end (see fig. 11). Juliussen has taken an inorganic material and shaped it into an organic form, thereby creating an intriguing dualism between man-made and natural objects. One could argue that the photographs are a man-made replication of nature. However, the viewer is aware that the circular forms are merely photographs, whereas the white fragments connected with glass are more deceptive. Dolomite is the same color as bone. Thus it is hard to differentiate between the two, when the stone is shaped as bone. Due to their close resemblance, one wonders why Juliussen chose to incorporate white dolomite instead of reindeer bone. Perhaps the use of only animal remains could have created an inharmonic relationship between the piece and the building. One may also notice the apostrophe in the title. My interpretation is that this reinforces the idea that the piece and the portal are conceptually integrated, rather than merely a decoration. The antler owns the portal!

Figure 11:
***Horn'Portal*, detail**

It is not a coincidence that Juliussen has replicated objects which correspond with the building's materials. From an art historical perspective, the act of imitating objects

[36] Juliussen 8.12.04
[37] Jaffé 1964, p. 240
[38] Ibid
[39] Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1994, p. 200
[40] Jaffé 1964, p. 249

can be seen in Assemblage[41] and associated with certain art movements, for example Arte Povera[42] and Pop art[43] from the 1960s. Artists such as Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg and Jasper Johns forced the viewer to consider what is "art" versus "real life." Through their art, these artists drew an unclear division between illusion and reality.

The dolomite stone also has symbolic properties. Stone has a negative connotation in the Sámi fairytale about *Durkkihanvárri*, which is a mountain in Kautokeino. A large number of stones on the mountain resemble a reindeer herd. According to the fairytale, reindeer have turned to stone because the people did not follow the rules. In Norwegian culture, trolls turn to stone if the sun shines on them. Perhaps this explains why Western culture believes that stones have a soul, "Stones are not lifeless masses. Living stones fell from Heaven and they remain alive after their fall."[44] According to the legend of Prometheus, stones display the twofold movement of rising and falling, humans are born of God and return to God.[45] In Vietnamese culture, stone is regarded as a sort of Earth-Mother, and said to bleed if struck by a pick.[46] Perhaps the dolomite imparts *Horn'Portal* with a soul, reinforces the theme of life.

Here, as in the piece *Metamorfose*, antler is a dominating theme, which is emphasized by the title. However, in *Metamorfose*, antler was used as a means to represent the local Karasjok community as people are dependent upon reindeer. In essence it was a way to reflect everyday life within the Sámi Parliament. Reindeer antler in *Horn'Portal* has a different meaning, it expresses strength and aggressiveness. In *Metamorfose*, Juliussen incorporated carefully selected antler segment that were interesting in form, emphasizing the smooth and sensual qualities of antler. Whereas in

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[41] Assemblage was a term coined in 1953 for an art form where different materials are assembled into three-dimensional structures. Materials such as natural and manufactured, traditionally non-artistic, for example *object trouvés* (found objects). This medium was often used by the Surrealists. http://www.groveart.com/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=657426853&hitnum=1&section=art.004631, 19.04.06

[42] Arte Povera, meaning "impoverished art," was a term coined in 1967, for a group of Italian artists who attempted to break down the "dichotomy between art and life." Their artworks mainly included sculptures made from everyday materials and happenings. The movement was also linked to contemporary political radicalism. http://www.groveart.com/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=335781950&hitnum=1&section=art.004357, 19.04.06

[43] Pop art was an international movement (centered in Britain and the U.S.) in painting sculpture and printmaking. The term originated in the mid 1950s. Artists were concerned with the "artifacts of popular culture." Underlying aesthetic characteristics included "aggressively contemporary imagery, anonymity of surface, strong, flatly applied colors and a stylistic unity often associated with centralized compositions." http://www.groveart.com/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=647319864&hitnum=1&section=art.068691, 19.04.06

[44] Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1994, p. 932

[45] Ibid

[46] Ibid., p. 933

Horn'Portal, the segments are bluntly cut on both ends seeming to shift the focus from aesthetics to raw power, strength and masculinity. Antler, more specifically horns, are said to convey power and aggression:

> *In the association of horns* (antler) *with a political or religious leader [Iroquios chieftain, Alexander the Great, Siberian shaman and so on] we discover a process of annexation of power through the magical appropriation of symbolic objects* [...] *Horns, as trophies, are an exaltation and appropriation of strength. Victorious Roman soldiers decorated their helmets with little horns.*[47]

Juliussen had the Tromsø coat of arms in mind when she created *Horn'Portal* (see fig. 12).[48] Looking at this symbol, one may notice that the reindeer's antlers appear abnormally large again reinforcing the idea of strength and power.

Figure 12: Tromsø's coat of arms

In having masculine traits antler, or horns, are therefore also representative of the life force, or the cycle of creation. Their natural function evokes the thrust of the male sexual organ.[49] I believe Juliussen creates a dichotomy of male versus female elements, by combining glass (possessing feminine qualities) and antler. Juliussen writes, "Generally things made from glass symbolize spirit and wisdom and are often associated with magical powers […]. Glass objects are often representative of the passive, female."[50] I have been unable to locate a source that directly sites glass as a symbol of femininity. However, glass has been characterized as representing, purity, virginity, brittleness and short-lived beauty.[51] All of these qualities are in fact stereotypical examples often associated with femininity, and therefore can be said to support this idea.

From both a global and regional standpoint, the use of animal remains in art has often been interpreted as having a sensual dimension. The use of animal products seems to attempt to push past clichéd assumptions about our (mankind's) relationship with the natural world.[52] Forms such as ovals, reindeer footprints and large oblong shapes have been characterized as symbols of fertility in Sámi art.[53] For example, the Swedish Sámi artist Rose Marie Huuva created a swollen oblong form, made from reindeer hide, in her

[47] Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1994, p. 514; The parentheses are mine, the brackets are written by Chevalier and Gheerbrant.
[48] This blue insignia hangs on the building's façade. Every municipality in Norway has a coat of arms, in Norwegian it is called a *kommunevåpen*. Image taken from: www.tromso.kommune.no, 15.11.05
[49] Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1994, p. 514
[50] Juliussen 8.12.04
[51] Vries 1984, p. 216
[52] Baechtel 06.03.05, p. D-12
[53] Svendsen 2001 (Nr. 3), pp. 149, 151

piece titled *Nioni* (1989).[54] Located on the top of the form is a narrow oval opening, from this point a line of fur extends to the bottom of the piece.

Figure 13: Nicola Costantino, *Human Furriery*, 2000

Juliussen has remarked that one of her influences is Nicola Costantino, a contemporary artist from Argentina.[55] In 2002, Costantino exhibited works in various Norwegian cities including Oslo, Tromsø, Trondheim, Stavanger, Kristiansand and Haugesund.[56] Similar to Juliussen, Costantino explores the problematic of either taking or replicating a repulsive material (such as animal remains) and turning it into something aesthetically appealing. Additionally she engages the viewer with contrasting, perhaps slightly unsettling elements. She designs clothing in silicone, which visually replicates human skin. After that she adorns the surface with realistic replicas of navels, nipples and anuses (see fig. 13). Her coats and dresses are garnished with real human hair.[57] Costantino's works seem to verge on the edge of Surrealism, there is something vaguely familiar in these garments that provokes certain uneasiness. It is uncertain whether Juliussen's art provokes the viewer in the same way as Costantino's, yet both artists generate a significant amount of tension by creating works that combine contrasting elements (conceptual and visual). Similar to Juliussen, Costantino questions issues of life and death by using a "dead" material. Like Juliussen, Costantino uses dead materials to represent life. Costantino depicts body parts, which are symbolically charged. In doing so, the skin seems to be alive rather than leather-like. She also raises ambivalence between male and female parts, for example male nipples (in her work the nipple is always a man's) represented on a woman's bodice.[58] In a sense she reverses the traditional female and male roles: "There is an element of the symbolic domination of women over men that inverts conventions both historical and present, and turns men into objects of

[54] Rose Marie Huuva, *Nioni,* 1989. Reindeer hide and fur, 80 cm x 40 cm x 38 cm (31" x 16" x 15"). The Sámi Collections Museum (De Samiske Samlinger), Karasjok.
[55] Juliussen, interview with the author, 19.04.05
[56] http://www.nicolacostantino.com.ar/life/index.htm, 19.04.06
[57] Selected works by Costantino were displayed in an exhibit titled, *Human Furriery* at Deitch Projects in New York in September, 2000: http://www.nicolacostantino.com.ar/bio/index.htm, 14.03.06
[58] Herkenhoff 2001 See also http://www.nicolacostantino.com.ar/press/index.html, 21.04.06

manipulation, into wimps."[59] However, it does not seem that the reversal of traditional roles is a part of Juliussen's agenda.

One can locate symbols of fertility or sexuality in *Horn'Portal*. It is these sexual aspects that have led me to interpret *Horn'Portal* as a frieze of life. The two sides of the portal are mirror images of one another, seeming to symbolize a circle of life. The horn/iron/dolomite forms can be viewed as sperm on route to fertilize the egg, as represented by the circular photographs. This idea is also verified by the deep red background color. Nevertheless the color red has ambivalence tendencies in all cultures:

> *There is no single nation which - each in its own way - has not given expression to the ambivalence from which the colour red derives its powers of fascination. Intimately connected within it are the two most profound human impulses - doing and suffering, freedom and tyranny - as so many red flags fluttering in the winds of the twentieth century go to show*.[60]

The dark crimson red color depicted in *Horn'Portal*, is a color that has been associated with the nocturnal, female, secrets and ultimately the mystery of life.[61] I register this crimson color as suggestive of a womb, wherein the sperm and egg are located. The iron "sperm" also fit into this ideology. Symbolically, iron has fertile properties. Women from the Watchaga, a Hamitic tribe from Kenya wear iron necklaces and bangles to stimulate pregnancy and cure their children's illnesses.

Figure 14: Edvard Munch, *Madonna*, 1895

One may notice that the number four appears on multiple occasions in *Horn'Portal*. There are eight clusters, four on each side. Each cluster consists of four antler/dolomite/iron/glass forms. The number four is a symbol of importance in many cultures, and historically has a large role in North American Indian philosophy and way of thought:

> *It is conceived as a principle of organization, and in some sense a potency. Space is divided into four regions, time measured in four units (day, night, moon and year); plants have four parts (root, stem, flower and fruit); there are four different animal species, those which crawl, those which fly, those which move on four feet and those which move on two; the four heavenly bodies are the sky, the sun, the moon and the starts and there are four winds which move in a circle round the earth. Human life is divided into four 'hills,' childhood, youth, maturity, and old age; there are four basic qualities in man- courage, endurance, generosity and*

[59] Lebenglik 2001 See also http://www.nicolacostantino.com.ar/press/index.html, 21.04.06
[60] Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1994, p. 795
[61] Ibid., p. 792

> *faithfulness- and four in woman- skill hospitality, faithfulness and fruitfulness- and so on.*[62]

Considering the *Horn'Portal*, the repetitive theme of the number four seems to allude to nature and fertility.

Horn'Portal is reminiscent of the piece *Madonna*, by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (see fig. 14). Perhaps Juliussen was inspired by this piece. In *Madonna*, Munch's red border seems to frame the composition in the way that *Horn'Portal* functions as a frame for the room. I believe that this adds a theatrical element, by acting as a stage for the room. As we can see, Munch has depicted a red border with sperm and an image of an embryo/fetus (on the bottom left corner of the composition). Munch had a somewhat pessimistic approach to the psychic and physiological process of love: seduction, sex and pain. To repeat Munch's own words, the Madonna represented "the mystique of an entire evolution brought together," and his paintings "the life of the soul […] called love."[63] That aside, I find it fascinatingly similar to *Horn'Portal*, a red border that appears "womb-like" is present in both works.

[62] Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1994, p. 404
[63] Cordulack 2002, p. 63

Dust and Bones (Dopmu ja dávttit)

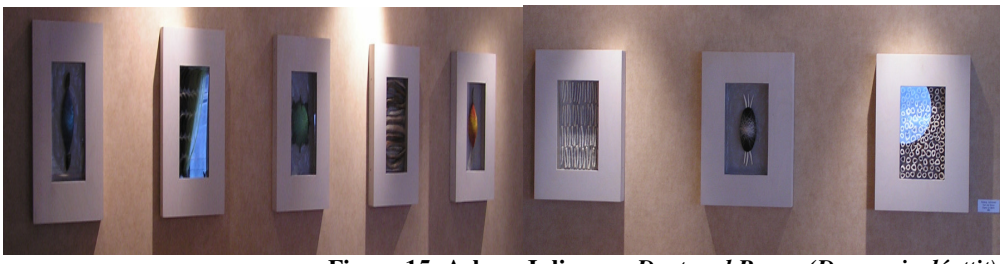

Figure 15: Aslaug Juliussen, *Dust and Bones (Dopmu ja dávttit)*

Year: 2003

Location: *Midnatsol*, Dining Hall, Hurtigruta[64]

Eight 3D frames (approximately): 50 cm x 39 cm x 7 cm (20" x 15" x 3")

Media: reindeer antler/bone/hooves, black and white/colored thread, wooden frames with glass panes

Juliussen was astonished when Hurtigruta's adornment committee wanted her to decorate their dining hall with reindeer remains. Juliussen writes,

> *When I was offered this project, my first thought was, how am I going to create a form using this material which will not cause people to loose their appetites, but rather be something that is visually appealing? I wanted to combine the animal materials (bone and hooves) in such a way that they were not associated with butchering and slaughtering.*[65]

With this piece, Juliussen wanted to express natural elements in an institutional setting. The way she portrays the antler/bone removes any hint of grotesque or macabre associations that are often connected to remains. These reindeer remains are out of context, they have been removed from their natural setting of blood and death (see fig. 16). By framing each individual composition behind a "contemporary barrier," she establishes a distance between them and the viewer. I believe it is the "modern" quality of the frames that neutralizes any image of death that may be expressed by the bones. The work may have given a different reaction, if the frames had been dark, dusty or antique looking. In such a setting, the bones could easily have created a repulsive environment for guests dining in the restaurant.

As mentioned before, *Dust and Bones* is made up of eight individual framed compositions. One of these compositions nearly makes the viewer forget that they are looking at bone (see fig. 17). It is almost as if the title is there to remind the viewer what

[64] Hurtigruta is a Norwegian cruise company with ships that sail along the western coast of Norway. The ship *Midnatsol* (Midnight Sun) was built in 2003.
[65] Juliussen, e-mail correspondence, 13.10.05

the piece is composed of. Here we see bone fragments that are arranged and sliced into different sizes. While unmodified bone in artworks is not very common, the bones in this piece have become something else. The proceeding dialogue is left up to the viewer's own interpretation.

Interestingly, Juliussen provides a Sámi translation of the title *Dust and Bones* in parenthesis. In doing so, I am reminded of Juliussen's bicultural background. As a result, one of the framed compositions reminds me of the Iñupiaq blanket toss (see fig. 18). The Iñupiaq blanket toss, or *nalukatak,* is a traditional activity that people still participate in Alaska today during the spring whaling festival. Traditionally, one of the purposes of this celebration is to appease the spirits of the deceased whales and ensure their return for future hunting seasons.[66] Such ceremonies are arranged by the whaling captains, called *umialit*, after a successful hunt. Following food and informal conversation, the *nalukatak* skin, or "skin for tossing," is brought out. The skin is made of several walrus hides sewn together. About thirty, or more, Iñupiat form a circle around the skin, holding on to either a rolled edge or a rope handgrip. The objective is to toss a person as high in the air as possible, sometimes up to six meters (twenty feet).[67] The rounded green form mimics the skin as it is being pulled to the ground, while the antler pieces surrounding the form appear to be the individuals holding the skin (see fig. 18). The only thing absent is the *umialik* hopping on the blanket. Usually the successful *umialit* are the first to be thrown. After being thrown in the air, the individual is expected to keep their balance and land upright on the blanket, more skilled individuals perform flips and turns. Once a person loses their footing, another takes a turn, this continues until everyone has had a chance to participate.[68] Through framing, Juliussen seems to be documenting this activity for the viewer.

Figure 16: ***Dust Bones and (Dopmu ja dávttit)*****, detail**

Figure 17: ***Dust and Bones (Dopmu ja dávttit)*****, detail**

The bone fragments in this piece are virtually unmodified and seem to remain in their natural state (see fig. 16). It appears as if they have been merely washed, cut and

[66] Chance 1990, p. 116
[67] Ibid
[68] Ibid

arranged into different patterns (see fig. 17). The bone has neither been etched nor colored. Since prehistoric time, artists have allowed natural materials, especially stone, to speak for themselves. This is also evident in modern art, for example in the work of the Swiss sculptor Hans Aeschbacher, the American sculptor James Rosati, and the German-born artist Max Ernst. In 1935 Ernst wrote in a letter:

> *Alberto* [the Swiss artist Giacometti] *and I are afflicted with sculpturitis. We work on granite boulders, large and small, from the moraine of the Forno glacier. Wonderfully polished by time, frost and weather, they are in themselves fantastically beautiful. No human hand can do that. So why not leave the spadework to the elements, and confine ourselves to scratching on them the runes of our mystery?*[69]

Ernst clearly recognizes, and is enthralled with, the aesthetic beauty of natural forms.

Compositionally, the bone/antler pieces are extraordinarily arranged, creating interesting and aesthetically forms. In spite of the variance in color, shape and size of each bone/antler fragment, the pieces are similar enough to create a seemingly repetitive pattern. Encountering the framed bone compositions, one can easily become lost in the piece, forgetting altogether that the bone fragments are actually found objects. One could argue that Juliussen has created "natural" or "organic" readymades in *Dust and Bones*. The term "readymade" arose in 1915. It implied that an ordinary object, when isolated from its functional context, could be elevated to the status of art by an artist.[70] In chapter five, I will explain why such "natural" readymades are recognized as fine art objects.

Figure 18: ***Dust and Bones (Dopmu ja dávttit)*****, detail**

Four of the frames in *Dust and Bones* are only composed of reindeer remains. In two of the frames, Juliussen has altered the preexisting material to a greater extent by cutting the bone, while they are unmodified in the other two. We can say there is a dialogue between two groups: readymades versus constructed forms. Each frame is alternating hung in this fashion. However, the criteria of what identifies as true readymades can be argued. Do the strings connecting the bones to the frame prevent this piece (see fig. 16) from being classified as a readymade? Duchamp

[69] Jaffé 1974, p. 234 (The brackets written after "Alberto" are Jaffé's)
[70] http://www.groveart.com/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=607435905&hitnum=1&section=art.070990, 16.03.06

tried to determine the boundaries/limits of the term art.[71] In this respect, Juliussen differs in her intention since she uses the remains as elements in a composition.

Several contemporary circumpolar artists depict nature using a simple form of expression, or create so-called "natural readymades." Two examples are the Norwegian Sámi artists Iver Jåks and Ingunn Utsi. Both create sculptures which may be interpreted as paralleling nature. Utsi creates pieces which mimic wind, air and water through the use of unhandled materials (such as wood) combined with man-made materials (like Plexiglas). In his sculptures, Iver Jåks works with objects from nature without manipulating their form. He often creates compositions by arranging objects found in nature. Yet in doing so, he creates poetic compositions. Similar to the bones in *Dust and Bones*, Jåks' objects seem to become something more than they once were. He often employs pieces of wood that he has found and collected himself. Jåks does not believe in preservation of his "natural readymade" sculptures. Rather, he believes that the sculpture should live and that instead of conservation, the processes of nature should rule in the end. The appearance of the sculpture changes as the piece decays.[72]

[71] Duchamp signed *Fountain,* with the pseudonym R. Mutt, but this was merely a testimony of designating the piece as an art form.
[72] Snarby 2002, p. 77

Ronald W. Senungetuk

> *If the Native artists are categorized into some unfavorable group, they are the only ones who can break out of it. The individual members of the group should have absolute right to call themselves Native artist or just artist. No entity should expect the Native artist to be just that, just because he is Native. Art instead should be the main concern.*
>
> -Ronald W. Senungetuk[73]

Ronald W. Senungetuk is already a legendary artist. His heritage is Alaska Native, but he is not partial to being recognized as an Alaska Native artist: "I label myself as just an artist while others may feel they need to have some kind of tie with being Native."[74] He sees himself as a global artist who often borrows elements from traditional Alaska Native art.[75] One day his artwork is influenced by Native form, while at other times it diverges into abstraction, lacking any connection with Alaska Native art. He felt like he found his identity after leaving Alaska.[76] Perhaps this is why his focus is not primarily on his Iñupiaq heritage. He perceives his art as a result of enriched bicultural experiences. Like Juliussen, he takes advantage of the freedom artistic expression allows, "All world art regardless of age is based on a will to express. You 'portray' art because you are a member of society and you interpret what is around you. While doing this others may try to limit you, but you have no limits."[77]

Senungetuk was born and raised in Wales, Alaska, which is situated on the Bering Strait, across from Siberia. He was born in 1933 and spent his early childhood in Wales. Growing up in a subsistence lifestyle, art was not recognized in the Western sense. Rather, it was regarded as a craft or commodity. Senungetuk remarks, "We used to do little ivory carvings just so we could sell them to the store for a bag of raisins or some such things."[78] Already as a child, Senungetuk had a solid background in ivory carving, making objects such as sleds and toys. Local ivory artists instructed carving classes at the K-8th grade school he attended. As part of the school's curriculum, girls learned skin sewing while boys learned to carve ivory. As observed in his art, the technique of carving has followed him throughout his entire artistic career.

Since the high school in Nome was segregated, Senungetuk was sent to Mt. Edgecumbe School in Sitka, Alaska. The U.S. government had recently transformed the

[73] Senungetuk 1970, p. 51
[74] Schmitt 8.2.81, p. I-2
[75] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05
[76] Schmitt 1981, p. I-2
[77] Senungetuk, e-mail correspondence, 04.04.06
[78] Neyman 10.03.05, p. B-1

once navy station into a school where approximately 600 students, nearly all Alaska Native, attended. Due to the fact that Senungetuk was not athletic, he spent virtually all his time at the school's craft shop. It was here that he became acquainted with noted designer and woodworker George W. Fedoroff, a man who Senungetuk considers to have had the largest influence in his life.[79] During his four years at Mt. Edgecumbe, Federoff introduced Senungetuk to Western art. Recognizing his carving ability, Federoff encouraged him to combine wood and ivory together when making lamp bases and bowls. Impacted by Federoff's attitude toward art, Senungetuk was now in the mindset of creating fine art objects rather than applied art pieces.

Upon graduating from high school, Federoff, along with the Indian Arts and Crafts Board arranged a Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) scholarship for Senungetuk. He was granted one year of study at the School for American Craftsmen at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in Rochester, New York. Following his first year, he stayed on for three more years to earn his BFA and AAS degrees. While at RIT, Senungetuk worked under the artists Tage Frid and Hans Christensen, who were very instrumental in terms of his artistic development. In their disciplines, wood and metals respectively, both of them were front figures in the Danish modern style. One thing of importance regarding Tage Frid and Hans Christensen was their attitude towards teaching. Neither of them told Senungetuk to create Iñupiat or Alaska works, they focused more on individuality.[80] By giving students knowledge of technique and design, they hoped to encourage students to become individuals. As a result, Senungetuk's art from this period looked very European, rather than Alaska Native.

Senungetuk considers himself as a "joiner" of popular art movements. He was influenced by a number of different artists while he lived in New York.[81] There is not one single artist that particularly stands out in his mind, but rather a number of different artists, such as Jackson Pollock, Pablo Picasso, Franz Klein and Henry Moore. Senungetuk says, "Life is so fleeting that it is hard to remember them all, there are also many newcomers doing interesting work."[82] Even today, he continues to learn about artists, through reading, as well as attending galleries and museums.

Having primarily worked in wood, Senungetuk became interested in metals, (while in New York) mainly because of its small-scale practicality. Shipping large-scale

[79] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05
[80] Ibid
[81] Ibid
[82] Ibid

wooden works between Alaska and New York had proved to be somewhat challenging. Now he could buy metals in New York, transport them to Alaska, create the piece and then ship it back to New York again. He spent his summers in Alaska. In addition, this was the technique Hans Christensen specialized in. Since this time, Senungetuk has struggled between the two media, hesitant to focus all of his attention on one or the other. He calls himself a "slave of both disciplines."[83]

Frid and Christensen introduced Senungetuk to a new style of art in Scandinavia, which inspired him to travel there. In addition, they urged him to apply for a Fulbright scholarship at Statens Håndverks- og Kunstindustriskole (SHKS) (the same school Juliussen attended) in Oslo, Norway. Once awarded the Fulbright grant, in 1961, Senungetuk traveled to Oslo where he met Turid, whom he is married to today. During his stay he also spent time exploring other parts of Scandinavia. At this point his art style appeared very Scandinavian.

Towards the end of his year in Oslo, Senungetuk was offered a Carnegie grant to start an Arts program at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. At the same time he was offered a position as principle designer at Steuben Glass in Corning, N.Y., an offer which he declined. Instead he wanted to see what could be done with the art scene in Alaska. Thus he moved to Fairbanks, Alaska. He was one of very few Alaska Native artists, at that time, who had such a high level of art training/education. Abraham Anghik Ruben, a sculptor and former student of Senungetuk's says:

> *Senungetuk's timing was impeccable. He came at a time when Alaska Natives needed an infusion of culture and art, to prepare for the changes that were coming. He was able to change the course of Alaska art history single handedly, both Native and non-Native contemporary art. Ronald started teaching mask making, which inspired people to dance again, it gave the people a lot of strength.*[84]

During his long career at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Senungetuk soon became a key figure in the Alaska arts community. He was professor of art and design, and director of the Native Arts Center from 1965 to 1986. In addition, he was head of the art department from 1977 until his retirement in 1986.[85] During this time he dedicated one year's absence to a project in Nome. He was a true visionary in the Arts Department. The program grew from nothing to the country's only university studio degree program in Native art. Prior to that, the only college in the U.S. to offer any Native art education was

[83] Woodford 1999, p. 9
[84] Ruben quoted in Resz 2002, p. 34
[85] Braund-Allen and Decker 1999, p. 294

at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico.[86] Senungetuk was also active in the Alaska State Council on the Arts. He always focused on keeping the programs up to date, by inviting outside experts to come to Alaska. During his first ten years in Fairbanks, Senungetuk primarily created and taught art in the Western art sense. It was then he began to realize the sad state that Alaska Native art form was in, since it had been bastardized by the commercial world. As a result he became a large advocate for the development of Alaska Native art. Senungetuk says,

> *When I was in college and when I first started teaching, my work was really unrelated to Alaska style - lots of free forms, abstracts, pure shapes and pure forms, nothing to do with a symbol of this or that. Later I took a good look at Alaska Native art forms, and my work got more realistic. But I will always go back to abstraction.*[87]

By collecting books and going to museums in Europe and the U.S., he started a personal campaign to learn everything he could about pre-contact Alaska Native art. Anthropologists refer to this art form as Old Bering Sea art, which can be dated back 2,500 years. In terms of Alaska Native art history, Senungetuk considers this to be the "high art" period. Senungetuk's plight to discover pre-contact art resulted in his art shifting from an international style to an outwardly Alaska Native art style. For the past twenty or thirty years, his art has been connected to Alaska Native art form. He says, "I am updating the area's works to contemporary form."[88]

Currently Senungetuk lives in Homer, Alaska, where he has lived for the past seven years. Since his retirement, he has dedicated his time to work in his studio. Upon moving to Homer, Senungetuk held a show called, *Goodbye Bering Straight, Hello Homer*. Finding this theme weak, he returned to imagery from Bering Straight for inspiration, at least for the time being. Until then, we are held in anticipation, wondering where his art form will lead to next.

Figure 19: Ronald W. Senungetuk at Home
Homer, Alaska, 13.8.05

[86] Resz 2005, p. 26
[87] Senungetuk quoted in Woodford 1999, p. 10
[88] Senungetuk, e-mail correspondence, 04.04.06

Reindeer Herd I, II and III

Figure 20: Ronald W. Senungetuk, *Reindeer Herd I, II, III*

Year: 2003

Location: University of Alaska, Museum of the North, Fairbanks, Alaska

Dimensions (approximately): Each panel is 61cm x 91cm (24" x 36")

Medium: Cedar

One could interpret or analyze this work in a number of different ways. My interpretation is divided into two different directions, depending on which artistic role I mentally assign Senungetuk. That is, one can interpret this work by recognizing Senungetuk as an Iñupiaq artist, or as a mainstream artist. In other words, my interpretation is greatly influenced by what sort of mental baggage I have. The first stance is very much enveloped in a political and cultural context. Another influencing factor is where the work is located. There is no doubt that location can affect the viewer's perception of an artwork.

Is there such a thing as the context-less aesthetic experience? The American critic Clement Greenberg attempted to exercise this fact; he approached a work of art with eyes closed, literally! He believed that good art could be recognized if approached without inhibitions. Accordingly, in order to have an unbiased opinion, he would only open his eyes when he was right in front of the artwork.[89] Post-modernist critics on the other hand, disagree with this and believe in the culture-specific aspect of aesthetic experiences. I find the context-less experience to be very idealistic, but I still attempt to arrive at the work with an open mind.

Initially, I distinguish this piece as a series of abstract compositions, composed of exquisite contours carved in wood. The upper half of each composition depicts various

[89] Bydler 2004, p. 241. Bydler cites that her information on Clement Greenberg is based on his essay in Dorfles and McHale 1969, pp. 116-26. After having read this chapter myself, I was unable to find any direct link between Bydler's statements and Greenberg's writing. Thus, I must assume that Bydler has provided her own interpretation of Greenburg.

shades of blue. A recessed brown form divides each panel into two. I appreciate the abstract quality of this piece, because it allows for the interpretation of a general landscape. It can be interpreted as an outdoor landscape of sky and hills, or even a scene from the seafloor. The bow-like contours seem to sway rather than being static forms, similar to plants living on the ocean floor. Subtle movement in the water causes them to brush gently into one another in a seemingly non-abrasive fashion. If Senungetuk had stained the upper half of the panels in a less suggestive color, such as green or red, the viewer may not have deciphered it as sky or water.

My attention is also drawn to the wood's natural beauty. Senungetuk does not sculpt the wood, but draws into it with carving tools. On one level he uses the wood as a canvas and support, but on another level he portrays the beauty of the wood itself. Landscape artists typically depict impressions or feelings associated with a certain place. Senungetuk depicts natural beauty by displaying it directly. Each panel is made of cedar, which has been stained in a variety of different colors: red, pink, faded blue, white and yellow. Each stain is applied with thin multiple coats, using either a small brush or what Senungetuk refers to as a "dabber," which is a piece of cloth attached to a stick. The deeper colors are made up of multiple coats, as many as five or six.[90] Even though Senungetuk has stained the wood, he has not concealed the wood's natural beauty, occurrences such as wood grain, lines and knots still remain visible. Senungetuk often creates smoothly carved lines, leaving minimal texture in many places. In the middle of the panel we find the most texture, illustrating that he has not tried to conceal the fact that the images were carved.

Figure 21: ***Reindeer Herd I, II, III,*** **detail (far right panel)**

As a viewer, I have a desire to stand very close to the piece and investigate the wood itself. If one looks carefully, the wood conveys stories of its own (see fig. 21). In the far right panel, a human head and a navel appear. I believe it is significant that Senungetuk has deliberately left this image in the wood, reinforcing the celebration of a natural medium. This piece is not covered by a Plexiglas panel, something Senungetuk believes would have deducted from the overall experience of the piece, as it creates a less intimate relationship for the viewer. By not protecting this

[90] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05

panel, Senungetuk shows more apprehensive about the survival of the idea and less concern about damage to the piece. This will be reflected on more closely in the investigation of *Life II*.

From another standpoint I think of Senungetuk as an Iñupiaq artist. The title suggests that these abstract compositions are a reindeer herd. Taking this into consideration, the once abstract compositions suddenly become a herd of reindeer racing through a landscape. Each panel can be horizontally divided into three parts. Within each section, various contours suggest a part of the reindeer's body. In the upper part we can see contours resembling antlers, where pairs of bow-shaped lines originate near the middle of the panel and extend upwards to the top of the panel. The brown section that extends across the middle of the panel acts as a division in the landscape and establishes a separation between sky and earth. It also appears to be the reindeer's bodies. They run so fast that their bodies blur into one solid form. In the bottom section of the panel, we find contours that bend just like the legs of reindeer.

Figure 22: *Reindeer Herd, I, II, III,* detail (far right panel)

After having spent time in Tromsø learning about Sámi culture, I distinguish forms that I may not have seen before. Interpreting the composition as a reindeer herd, I perceive three white lavvo (*lávvu*) in the panel on the far right (see fig. 22).[91] These lavvo are created by adding shades of white and blue between the negative forms of the "antler" contours. This exercises how the viewer's perception can become completely altered at any given moment.

The overall design of this piece suggests that it would work well as a wood block print.[92] There is an obvious interest in negative form. It is these kinds of forms that would transfer successfully into a wood block print. Senungetuk creates a sort of tension by exploring the interplay between figures and the background. He has created an unclear

[91] A lavvo is a Sámi reindeer herder's tent, similar to the Native American teepee. The walls are a series of birch logs that have been arranged into a circular or ovular support or tripod. Traditionally, leather (nowadays canvas) covers this wooden skeleton, leaving an opening near the top of the tent, which acts as a smoke vent. This way, a fire can be burned inside the tent. Tveterås, Arntsen, and Jernsletten 2002, p. 38

[92] The graphic arts have a long held tradition in Alaska Native art. For some examples of artworks, refer to: Ray 1996, pp. 38-47

division between the two, leaving it up to the viewer's interpretation. This uncertainty excites and engages the viewer. Senungetuk is aware that his wood panels are compatible to printmaking forms, but he does not care for printmaking at all, like soapstone carving, he finds it excessively messy.[93] I believe that the wood medium allows Senungetuk to stay in tune with nature. Even though wood block prints depict wood grain and other textures, none of the wood's natural beauty is lost when displayed itself. Technique is involved as well; printmaking would divert time away from the act of carving.

In terms of technique, carving is reminiscent of Old Bering Sea art, where Native artists often carved on ivory surfaces. His background in the craftsman tradition where joining of the wood and other carving techniques are highly valued, is more compatible with wood carving than printmaking. Well crafted-ness is important for Senungetuk, as he was educated during the American Crafts Movement in New York in the 1940s. Regardless, he is customarily more concerned with the idea rather than the survival of the physical artwork. He once said, "My satisfaction in doing any artwork is to know that it is well made. Competent techniques are essential elements in my design work and eventual exposition of creative impulses, so my works tend to blend technical research and creative expression."[94] In order to celebrate wood's depth and grain, he carefully used cabinet scrapers which actually cut the wood fibers rather than abrading the wood with sandpaper.[95]

Considering the reindeer imagery, this piece is inspired by nineteenth century ivory carvings from the Seward Peninsula area. Senungetuk was influenced by worldwide museum collections that exemplify reindeer herding on ivory surfaces. Many of these genres were in fact abstracted, rather than naturalistic.[96] Carvings of both representational scenes and geometric forms were often executed on an array of ivory objects including: bow drills, bag handles, cribbage boards, pipes, whole walrus tusks and whale teeth.[97]

Traditional ivory carvings are typically regarded as utilitarian pieces of art. That is, something that would be used in religious ceremonies, such as a mask, ceremonial blanket, beadwork, drum or dance fan, these are only a few examples of decorative paraphernalia found in traditional Iñupiat ceremony. Senungetuk has broken free from the boundaries of traditional art he grew up with, giving his art another dimension. *Reindeer*

[93] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05
[94] Senungetuk quoted in Braund-Allen and Decker 1999, p. 294
[95] Ibid
[96] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05
[97] Blackman and Hall 1988, p. 326

Herd I, II, III is art for art's sake. Senungetuk has taken traditional decorative art and transformed it into a contemporary composition. *Reindeer Herd I, II, III* breaks with tradition conceptually and in terms of medium on the one hand, yet embraces it as well. The reindeer imagery serves as a feature of the local. Senungetuk contemplates the reindeer as an interesting form. His handling of the reindeer antlers and bodies is extraordinary.

Even though I was raised in Alaska, I did not see reindeer when I first encountered this piece. At the time it was on display at the Rasmuson Foundation office in a bank building, which does not have any direct ties to Native culture. Many different artworks hang in this workplace, not all of which were done by Native artists. Perhaps my interpretation would have resulted differently if this had been an Alaska Native institution or exhibition.

Sila

Figure 23: Ronald W. Senungetuk, *Sila*

Year: 2001

Location: Rabinowitz Courthouse (in front of the gallery), Fairbanks, Alaska[98]

Dimensions (approximately): Three spherical shaped clusters: each cluster is 3,7 m (12') in diameter, and are located 3,0 m (10') from the floor. The clusters occupy 9,14 m (30') in total length.

Each cluster weighs 17 kg (37 lbs).

Media: Laminated silver maple, stainless steel aircraft cables and hardware.

Upon entering the Rabinowitz Courthouse in Fairbanks, Alaska, one encounters a large foyer with a gallery. Our attention is immediately drawn to three spectacular abstract

[98] A gallery is the building's upper storey, which is open on one side to the main interior space: http://www.groveart.com/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=537985750&hitnum=4&section=art.030513, 12.03.06

sculptures suspended in midair. While dwelling on *Sila*, one most likely identifies it as a non-representational contemporary modern artwork. The viewer may also notice that the piece is dynamic. Silently the piece moves, which causes subtle changes in the overall composition. The mobile provides the foyer with a kind of harmony, due to its slow unforeseen movements. In addition, the mild colors warm up the room and break the cold nature of a typical courthouse.

Sila is composed of three large asymmetrical structures that are suspended from the foyer's ceiling by stainless steel aircraft cables. Each of the three units is an assembly of various laminated silver maple strips, which have been tapered and shaped into slightly curved forms (see fig. 25). *Sila* is one of three major works located in the foyer. A painted copper panel titled, *A Wilderness of Mystery*, by Fairbanks artist Arthur William (Bill) Brody (seen in background of fig. 23). The other, a painted portrait entitled, *Portrait of Justice Jay A. Rabinowitz* by Evgeny Baranov (seen in background of fig. 24).[99]

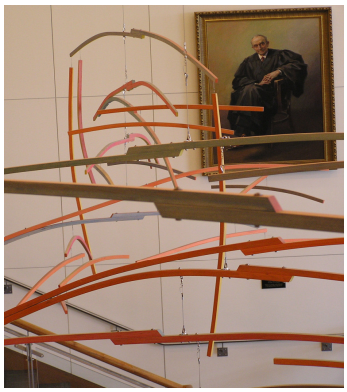

Figure 24: *Sila*, detail

In the Iñupiaq language, *sila* connotes sky, cosmos or universe. The closest corresponding term in English is the aurora borealis. Senungetuk chose the Iñupiaq word *sila* because he interprets the word to have a broader meaning than the English version.[100] He considers it a more all-inclusive term, but could there be other motives behind this choice? One could argue that the act of titling the work *Sila* means that he wants to be recognized as an Iñupiaq artist, or draw attention to his Alaska Native heritage. In general, most Alaskans are unfamiliar with the word *sila.* Therefore the name *sila* captures some of the mystery of the piece, which Senungetuk must have had in mind. This piece did not immediately strike me as a representation of the aurora borealis (see fig. 25). Note that if the piece had been given the English title (aurora borealis), one

Figure 25: *Sila*, detail

[99] Rabinowitz was formerly a judge and a supreme-court justice in Fairbanks for thirty-two years.
[100] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05

would immediately associate the piece as representational rather than a modern abstract art form, void of any local attributes. As Arthur C. Danto has eloquently stated, "Titles, of course, are frequently directions for interpretation […]."[101] Thus, if Senungetuk had entitled the piece *Composition I* for example, he would have hidden obvious ties to his Iñupiaq heritage. In recognizing the piece as something inspired by the aurora borealis, our investigation takes another turn.

Visually, the two most remarkable aspects of the natural phenomenon are its brilliant colors and swirling movements; luminous multi colored columns of light, dancing rapidly across the sky. *Sila* is realistic structurally, but exercises an arbitrary use of color. This is in fact the direct opposite of representations done by other artists. Photographs and two-dimensional depictions of the aurora borealis may capture color, but not its movement in the sky. Thus I believe that *Sila* interprets the figure of the aurora borealis in an innovative way. Consider for example the piece *Arctic Sonata* (see fig. 26), located outside the entrance of the courthouse by Alaskan artist, Keith Appel (in collaboration with Doug Morris and Nelson Gingerich). This piece depicts bright fluorescent blue and green colors, but is structurally flat. *Sila*'s colors are subdued earth tones that seem to be more consistent with the wood medium. They mimic natural shades of wood and are similar to colors Senungetuk has used in other works. He prefers ocher, red, white and black, the traditional colors used by Iñupiat in Alaska for more than 1,000 years.[102] Perhaps he felt that these ancient colors were the best way to depict a phenomenon which has enthralled his ancestors. Having inspected the courthouse foyer before he created *Sila*, perhaps he felt that these colors would coordinate with the formal setting of the courthouse, where fluorescent colors could have been distracting and overbearing.

Figure 26: Keith Appel, *Arctic Sonata*

Unlike Appel's piece, Senungetuk undertakes a new approach and explores the idea of conceptualizing the form and movement of the aurora borealis. In nature, one typically observes the aurora borealis by gazing upwards towards the sky. *Sila* replicates this action and it allows the viewer to explore the piece from many different angles. Upon entering the foyer; the viewer is forced to gaze upwards in order to enjoy all the aspects

[101] Danto 1974, p. 139
[102] Woodford 1999, p. 9

of the piece. One may to even choose to view the piece from the gallery, acquiring yet another perspective. Subtle movements made by air currents in the courthouse causes the wooden contours to move silently, thus mimicking the fluid movement of the aurora borealis. The cables, that suspend the piece, are connected to the wood with steel components and are visibly exposed, but do not interfere with rest of the piece (see fig. 27). In addition to creating mobility, the components simulate the illusion of lightweight structures dangling in space, seemingly independent from one another.

Similar to the piece *Reindeer Herd I, II, III*, it seems more global contemporary than "Indigenous," because of its abstract quality and lack of pictorial imagery from traditional Alaska Native art. One could argue that his schooling in New York contributed to this minimalist form of expression. *Sila* is reminiscent of the mobiles created by the accomplished American sculptor Alexander Calder (see fig. 28). In the 1930s, Calder was deemed as the inventor of a new art form, the mobile. This made him one of the most innovative abstract artists of the twentieth century. He once stated, "Why must art be static? You look at an abstraction, sculptured or painted, an entirely exciting arrangement of planes, spheres, nuclei, entirely without meaning. It would be perfect but it is always still. The next step in sculpture is motion."[103]

Senungetuk's association with the aurora borealis is in fact related to Iñupiaq mythology. Thus, one could argue that the conception of *Sila* stems from Senungetuk's Iñupiaq heritage. During Senungetuk's childhood in Wales, there was a constant presence of the aurora borealis in the wintertime.[104] As a child, he imagined the moving phenomena of the aurora borealis in the sky as ever present, colorful and turbulent. It had an awesome, almost mythological effect on the children living in Wales. There was a saying that: "bad behavior would result in the sky gods using the children's heads as footballs during their games."[105] This memory of the aurora borealis has stuck with Senungetuk and was the inspiration behind *Sila*. I find it fascinating how the Iñupiaq mythology of the aurora borealis, to a certain extent, corresponds with the ideology of the courthouse itself.

[103] Calder quoted in Prather 1998, p. 57. Calder incorporated various media into his mobiles including: sheet metal, glass, paint, wood and wire. His compositions are typically abstract and he often employs non-suggestive titles.
[104] Wales, Alaska is located at 66° north latitude.
[105] Senungetuk, e-mail correspondence, 14.11.05

Senungetuk did not necessarily have law in mind when he conceptualized this piece.[106] Yet I believe that Senungetuk's portrayal of the aurora borealis is directly related to the courthouse setting, one of law and order. The mobile hovers, in front of the gallery, and is in harmony with the concept that law keeps society in balance. Similar to children in Wales, a visitor to the courthouse is mesmerized into good behavior in the presence of *Sila*. Concerning law, *Sila* is something which may seem intimidating, yet peaceful at the same time. The piece keeps the visitor under control with the notion that at any given moment, one of the suspended wooden forms could plummet down upon their head. This is especially threatening as some of the wood pieces are not suspended horizontally, but vertically.

Figure 27: *Sila*, detail

The Rabinowitz Courthouse is not an Alaska Native institution. Hence there were no restrictions in terms of theme, in the very competitive and statewide competition of decorating the courthouse.[107] Senungetuk was a strong candidate because he is a renowned Alaskan artist and he had been a key force in the Fairbanks art community for nearly thirty years. The image of the aurora borealis is a well-suited theme for Fairbanks, and bestows the piece with a local identity.[108]

People ignorant of *Sila*'s relation to the aurora borealis could appreciate the form aesthetically, but would be unable to grasp its ideological significance. For Senungetuk the aurora borealis is a unique part of his heritage and is aesthetically interesting at the same time. Thus we could relate his non-conventional representation to either his Native heritage or his background in Western art. However, one could perhaps speculate that if Senungetuk had not grown up being mesmerized by the aurora borealis, he would not have conceptualized *Sila* in this way. To understand and fully appreciate this piece, it is therefore important to establish an awareness of his Native

Figure 28: Alexander Calder, *Untitled*, 1942

[106] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05
[107] Senungetuk, e-mail correspondence, 14.11.05
[108] The positions of the magnetic north pole, which vary with time, were in the 1970s approximately 76.1°N, 100°W (which is in the northern Canadian territory Nunavut, west of Ellesmere Island). The strength of the aurora and the intervals between them are dependent upon the distance from the magnetic north pole, not the geographical North Pole, so this explains why the aurora borealis is an important aspect of Alaska Native culture. Even though Fairbanks is located at 64° north (Trondheim is located at 63° north) the aurora borealis is a very active, since Alaska is very close to the magnetic north pole. Cullerne and Daintith 2000

heritage. Perhaps Senungetuk realized this, and for that reason conceived of the name *Sila.*

Life II

Figure 29: Ronald W. Senungetuk, *Life II*

Year: 1997

Location: Alaska Native Hospital, Anchorage, Alaska

Dimensions (approximately): 180 cm x 270 cm (6'x 9')

Medium: Laminated silver maple

Life II makes clear references to a hunting scene. In traditional Iñupiaq art, hunting scenes were carved onto ivory as a sort of offertory celebration for that animal. Hunters and gatherers believed that everything had a spirit. If one caught a whale, for example, they had to take care of its spirit. This entailed making images, dances and gestures that would please the whale so that it would return again the next year.[109]

Senungetuk exercises a creative solution in his representation of the animal in the far left panel (see fig. 29). He represents three different animals simultaneously, by depicting various fragments of reindeer, moose and caribou antler above the animal's head. Senungetuk has chosen animals that are typically found in northern regions of the world.

We have seen, in the discussions of the works *Reindeer Herd I, II, II* and *Sila*, that Senungetuk demonstrates an interest in abstracting images from nature. Even though these works were inspired by Alaska Native imagery, they seem to be more

[109] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05

inconspicuous of their portrayal of it. They were more abstract orientated. Unlike these works, *Life II* is more representational, thus having more obvious ties to traditional Alaska Native imagery. In regard to context, the fact that *Life II* is more representational is quite logical. Location was taken into consideration when Senungetuk formulated the idea for this piece. It is the only piece in my discussion that is located in an Alaska Native institution. Senungetuk's panels (five different pieces) were selected by a committee through a national competition.[110] The committee requested artworks representing images of Alaska Native culture and subsistence activities.[111] *Life II* is one unit of two works, the second piece is entitled *Life I* (see fig. 30). Both panels are intended to depict a way of life on the Seward Peninsula.[112]

Figure 30: Ronald W. Senungetuk, *Life I*, 1997

Although a number of figures in *Life II* suggest natural representations, such as the "reindeer" animal, dancers and drummers, there is also an ambivalence of abstraction. Consider for example, the elliptical and rectangular forms depicted in the bottom left-hand corner of the center panel (see fig. 31). Are these forms representational or abstract? Senungetuk provides the viewer with a certain freedom. Although they seem abstract, according to Senungetuk, they represent images from Alaska Native culture. He says the rectangular forms represent muktuk, while the ovals depict berries.[113] By depicting various berries using arbitrary colors, this enhances their non-representational quality. Due to the fact that they are isolated in one area of the composition could indicate that they are representational. Whereas the spots depicted on the reindeer's body are clearly abstractly decorative. Senungetuk translates vital entities connected to Alaska Native culture, from which he creates an aesthetically pleasing composition.

It is interesting how Senungetuk incorporates animal imagery from small-scale nineteenth century ivory carvings into a large-scale work. *Life II*'s monumental size

[110] All five works are located at the Alaska Native Hospital, but in different wings of the facility. The works are titled, *Life I, Life II, Alaska Native Values, Children at Play* and *Interior Alaska Native Values*.
[111] Senungetuk, e-mail correspondence, 14.11.05
[112] The Seward Peninsula juts out into the Bering Sea on the western coast of Alaska. It is located just below the Arctic Circle. The region is mostly bleak tundra, with long, cold winters. Wales is located at the western tip of the peninsula.
[113] Muktuk is the outer layer of skin and fat from a whale when eaten either raw or cooked.

dominates the space of the corridor and compels the viewer's attention. While contemplating *Life II*, one is almost forced to take a step back, even then, it is still difficult to catch a glimpse of the entire piece. Due to the lack of space in the hallway, the viewer must behold its presence up close.

Life II is not covered by Plexiglas, while another wooden panel work in this hospital, titled *Three Smooth Stones* by the late Alaskan Tlingit artist James Schoppert is.[114] This illustrates that Senungetuk is impartial to the preservation of his artworks, something I briefly mentioned earlier in the *Reindeer Herd I, II, III* section. The hospital prefers that the artworks are protected, but they respect Senungetuk's wishes.[115] The concept of not favoring the physical artwork can be linked to both traditional Alaska Native art and to the modern art concept of "art for art's sake." In Yup'ik culture for example, a ceremonial mask may be discarded after the ceremony. What an artist made once could be repeated later, virtually all functional art objects were dispensable.[116] Senungetuk champions the idea over process, and is not afraid to destroy a piece if he feels that the idea is not conveyed.[117] Thus, his agenda is slightly different from traditional Yup'ik art, where process (the act of creating) is favored over the physical artwork. He writes,

Figure 31: *Life II*, detail

Most of the intellectual and leading Alaska Natives I know resist terms like preservation because such terms imply last shots and dying cultures […]. *Preservation implies that we are something of the past and no longer relevant today. Museum collection curators very often become possessive of the works they preserve.*[118]

The "target" near the uppermost part of the center panel, is an image that is commonly found in ivory etchings (see fig. 32). Senungetuk is enthralled with this form. He did a target series for a period of five or six years, where he depicted both elliptical and circular targets.[119] The target image started appearing in traditional art on drill bows in the nineteenth century. The bow drill was an important tool for the Iñupiat. They used

[114] The piece measures approximately 56 cm x 178 cm (22" x 70"). I was, unfortunately, unable to track down the year of completion for this piece. The hospital purchased *Three Smooth Stones* over ten years ago from a gallery in Seattle and claim that they were not provided with such information. James Schoppert died in 1992, by looking at the work I would guess the piece was made in the 1980s.
[115] They seem eager to protect the panels because they have already been damaged by passing traffic in the hallway. Phone conversation with an Alaska Native Hospital representative, 17.03.06
[116] Fair 1993, p. 11
[117] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05
[118] Senungetuk, e-mail correspondence, 04.04.06
[119] Ibid., 14.11.05

it for starting fires, drilling holes in wood, bone, ivory.[120] Drill bows come in a variety of different shapes: four-sided, triangular, or two-sided with convex surfaces. Artists appreciated the small surface the drills provided, approximately a half inch at most, for carving pictorial scenes.[121] It was popular among European explorers to the Bering Strait area to collect these drill bows. Unfortunately, collectors were not concerned with the carvers' intentions, so what these pictorial scenes signified, is still unknown.[122] However, the way in which non-Native people were represented is almost comical. While Eskimo figures were involved in various activities (legs apart, arms upraised, running, smoking pipes, shooting a gun, tending a fish rack, jumping, wrestling or throwing) the non-Native person was static, wearing a hat (a slash atop his head) and arms akimbo.[123] Was the carver trying to illustrate the cultural differences between non-Native and Alaska Native people? Again, we can only guess. W.J. Hoffman, who illustrated part of Nelson's collection in *The Graphic Art of the Eskimos* (1897), hired Vladimir Naomoff from Kodiak, to interpret similar carvings. Even though Naomoff was Native, he deemed the task impossible because his culture was foreign to the Iñupiat. Firstly, Kodiak people did not even engrave drill bows. Secondly, "trying to explain the symbols was something like a Hopi man trying to explain the meaning of a Tlingit totem pole."[124] Dorothy Jean Ray's theory is that the pictorial scenes depict personal experiences.[125] If this is the case, it is literally impossible to interpret them.

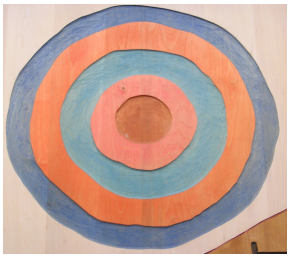

Figure 32: *Life II* (detail)

I believe the target in this piece connects two themes, nature and man. One may notice that the right panel includes humans, while the left panel depicts an animal. The target, centered in the middle panel connects both sides. There seems to be a rhythmical quality incorporated in this piece, established through repetition, such as the rings in the target and the four dancers located in the panel on the far right. The target can also be interpreted as a sun or the universe, due to its shape and location in the landscape. Yet this is not something Senungetuk is interested in. His interest in this form is based solely upon aesthetic appeal he says, "Some people can claim that these forms [targets] are a

[120] http://www.alaskanative.net/36.asp, 14.03.06
[121] Ray 1996, p. 100
[122] Ibid
[123] Ray 1996, p. 104
[124] Ray 1996, p. 100
[125] Ibid

symbol for the universe and so on, but I don't really want to get into that part."[126] Perhaps Senungetuk is reluctant to disclose too much information about his art, interpretation is left up to the viewer and art historians. Unlike Juliussen, he is not fond of writing about his art, "Creative ideas are developed by artists. Art historians take charge later on usually. So I don't write. I don't particularly care."[127]

Figure 33: Jasper Johns, *Target with Four Faces*, 1955

In a global perspective, many other artists have depicted similar targets, for example, Jasper John, a renowned American painter, sculptor and printmaker. He incorporated targets into the works *Target with Plaster Casts* (1955), *Target with Four Faces* (1955) and *Green Target* (1955). The target, in *Target with Plaster Casts*, does not exercise any hierarchy of focus and there is no bull's eye. Rather, there are concentric bands of blue and yellow creating a kind of neutral target. Above the target are body parts made from plaster. This unusual combination has been interpreted as Johns evoking himself.[128] All three of these works are encaustic and collage on canvas. Senungetuk's target seems to exercise greater depth since it is a relief carving. According to Kozloff, Johns seems to have developed a practice based on the supposition that "things have no intrinsic value," that there is no equivalence between a thing and what it represents. Both Johns and Senungetuk seem to leave interpretation up to the viewer, who is invited to exercise their own imagination.

[126] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05
[127] Senungetuk, e-mail correspondence, 04.04.06
[128] Orton 1994, p. 50

Chapter 3: Global Versus Indigenous Artist

> *In today's world where there is too much ethnocentrism, one certainly gets caught in some identity group. Good or bad, Eskimo art is lumped together. Native art is lumped together. Regardless of whether one's work looks Eskimo or not, all sorts of mail come from museums, special art shows, and do-good agencies requesting Native art primarily because one happens to be a Native. The prevalent reason for movement of Native art is to sell the products and yet I know of no Native artist who is rich. The movement of Native art has little to do with quality or recognition of individuals. Usually, the feeling toward the Native is one of condensation.*
>
> -Ron Senungetuk[1]

Artists in general do not like being characterized within a single category. Labels are imprecise, they can be hindering, limiting and affect the viewer's perception of the artwork. Compared to other contemporary circumpolar artists, is Juliussen's and Senungetuk's stance on this matter an exception or the norm? Who should decide if an artist is recognized as Indigenous, the art historian or the artist themselves? If the artist is not bothered, why does it matter, or are there consequences in having certain artist titles?

In terms of contemporary circumpolar art, a tension exists between the classifications of global and Indigenous. The late Norwegian art historian Eli Høydalsnes refers to this tension as a decision Sámi artists are almost forced to make. The choice is very absolute. Høydalsnes explains that one is either an ethnic artist or not. "If one chooses the 'ethnic' path, in worst case scenario, one risks an affectionate oppressive exoticism of their work. If one chooses the 'artistic' path, it is left up to society's conventions, with cultural colonialism as an eventual side effect."[2] Yet it seems like it should be possible to arrive at a middle range, why must the artist be recognized as either or? It is precisely the same awkward situation for contemporary Alaska Native artists, where there are virtually two types of artists. Firstly there are the traditionalists or craftspeople, which are typically rurally based and subsistence orientated. Their work seems unchanged from traditional art. Secondly are the contemporary "mainstream" artists, such as Senungetuk. These artists are typically well-traveled, formally educated and "culturally seasoned." The work of the contemporary artists belongs in galleries, while the work of their colleagues belongs in "shops."[3] Artists who try to move into a

[1] Senungetuk 1970, p. 44
[2] Høydalsnes 2003, p. 68
[3] Fair 1993, p. 20

different group are often criticized, the Alaska Native artist Susie Bevins-Ericsen states: "If you try anything new, traditionalists shun you, some critics dislike your work, and some Native people react with disdain […] but we have to be free."[4]

Being artists and partaking in the act of creation is what is essential for Juliussen and Senungetuk. When I asked Senungetuk if he wants to be recognized as an Alaska Native artist he replied:

> *In the first part of my career, I did not give a damn. I thought I am just an artist, that is all. I am an individual artist, not a group artist, not just an ivory carver, but just an artist. Since I extended beyond ivory carvers here (in Alaska), I was in a bigger circle, of just artists. Today it does not particularly matter to me. There is definitely a feeling for being called an Alaska Native artist rather than American artist. I guess I would just as soon be an American artist. But many people react to my work as Alaska Native*.[5]

In recognizing the artists' impartiality as to what they are referred to as, a number of questions arose. Was it besides the point that both artists were from a northern climate? Was their art context-less, a kind of global art? Did any aspects in their art hint at the artists' northern residence? During the 1990s a new type of artist emerged called the nomad, "at home everywhere and nowhere at the same time."[6] Conceivably through travel and exhibiting abroad, the artists feel at home in multiple places. Both Juliussen and Senungetuk have studied and spent time abroad. Their art sometimes exhibits a deliberate influence from Indigenous culture, while on other occasions the Indigenous aspects seem to be more veiled. It should be noted, however, that artworks alone do not provide answers, since interpretations are dependent on the viewer's perception. Perhaps Juliussen and Senungetuk hope the spectator first and foremost contemplates artistic quality, rather than tracing aspects from Indigenous culture. Yet in order to situate the art, how does one decide whether to place more focus on the Western, global or Indigenous aspects of their art?

According to Senungetuk, it is important for some contemporary Alaska Native artists to be identified with cultural elements, he writes:

> *There are artists who happen to be something like Aleut, Eskimo by birth, by race or by association with culture. In my case I don't care to be known as an Eskimo artist, though a lot of people like to use that label, but my work extends beyond being Eskimo. There are some artists who like to identify with the cultural elements, Larry Ahvakana, Joe Senungetuk* [Ronald W. Senungetuk's brother]. *Their work has elements of Alaska Native culture, cultural statements for Alaska*

[4] Bevins-Ericsen quoted in Tetpon 1987, p. H-1
[5] Senungetuk, interview with the author, 13.08.05
[6] Bydler 2004, p. 52

> *Natives. There certainly is a demand for work that qualifies as art but has some cultural elements.*[7]

Perhaps it is important for some artists to have a cultural association because art for some Indigenous peoples serves as a medium for negotiating identity. New generations have had to find their place between tradition and modernity. Artists are forced to search for identity amid an Indigenous heritage and mainstream culture, something that is no longer foreign and strange, but has become a part of the Indigenous history. Perhaps categorizing the artist can also restrict which culture banks they are allowed access to. This relates to what Hal Foster refers to as the "artist as ethnographer." I believe that Juliussen and Senungetuk fit into Foster's paradigm, "[…] if the invoked artist is not perceived as socially and/or culturally other, he or she has but limited access to this transformative alterity, and, more, that if he or she is perceived as other, he or she has automatic access to it."[8] Seeing as neither Senungetuk's nor Juliussen's art seems to reflect political activism, or raise questions concerning an "Indigenous identity," may also explain why they are do not feel the need to be recognized as Indigenous artists.

Unlike Juliussen and Senungetuk, there are other contemporary circumpolar artists who are adamant in their refusal of being identified as ethnic. Such artists seem to want to separate their art from their identity, trying to camouflage their life experiences. Perhaps there is a tendency to equate an artist with the role he or she fills, so that all of his or her actions are carelessly viewed as actions performed in his or her capacity as the occupant of that role.[9] It seems that people often assume that an Indigenous artist miraculously creates an artwork that will appear "Native," solely on the basis of the artist's heritage. Hypothetically speaking, although an artist creates an artwork which is strongly inspired by Indigenous culture or incorporates Native imagery, it cannot be expected to denote an artist's entire line of work. Nor can it be expected to represent an entire Indigenous culture. Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art, along with the rest of mainstream contemporary art, is individual. In other words, artists seek inwards and tell their own story. Why has Indigenous art, in general, been linked to a statement of an ethnical identity, which speaks on behalf of all Indigenous peoples? In creating art, artists are not limited to their Indigenous heritage. A sort of current language has developed from their own travels and life experiences.

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[7] Senungetuk, interview with Jan Steinbright, Jan/Feb 1986
[8] Foster 1994, p. 12
[9] Davies 1991, p. 86

The Norwegian Sámi artist Synnøve Persen is often quoted as having said "Free me from that which is Sámi!"[10] Persen claims that many Sámi artists, herself included, tiresomely work to break free from the folklore and stereotypes surrounding Sámi art.[11] It seems that researchers and critics of Indigenous art often focus too much attention on linking art and culture together. Perhaps this is a reasonable assumption for anthropologists dealing with traditional art, but what connection does this have with contemporary visual art? The artist may not actively focus on Indigenous culture in their art. Persen does not want to be connected with an Indigenous culture, because she feels that it is not a part of her artistic expression. She maintains that it is problematic to decide where Sámi art is best situated, either in an Indigenous, or in a Western European art perspective.[12] I believe that locating culture in art is extremely difficult. As Homi K. Bhabha eloquently stated, "[…] we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion."[13] Bhabha describes our current state as being in the realm of the beyond which is "neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past."[14]

As I have mentioned earlier, it seems that the art should be considered first and foremost. Yet if the art leads in two directions, toward the local and global, as we have seen with Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art, who decides if an artist or their art should be referred to as an Indigenous? The Alaskan artist Sonya Kelliher-Combs believes that it should be left up to the artist to decide.[15] She reacts strongly when people try to characterize her under one description, "I'm proud to be a Native Alaskan, but I'm also a woman, and a human being, a wife, sister and daughter. It frustrates me when labels are used by people in positions of power to define me."[16] To illustrate this, she placed herself in a box wearing a ceremonial dress combining Iñupiat and Athabascan insignia.

[10] Persen quoted in Høydalsnes 2003, p. 68 Synnøve Persen is primarily a painter of nonfigurative and figurative compositions, many of which involve strong contrasting colors: Tveterås, Arntsen and Jernsletten 2002, p. 112
[11] Persen 2000, p. 66
[12] Ibid., p. 64
[13] Bhabha 1994 ("Beyond the pale: Art in the age of multicultural translation"), p. 15
[14] Bhabha 1994 (*The Location of Culture*), p. 1
[15] Kelliher-Combs has Iñupiaq, Athabascan, Irish and German heritage.
[16] Kelliher-Combs quoted in Baechtel and Smith 28.8.05, p. D-8

This was in 1999 as part of the SoNot artists collective.[17] There was a banner on the front of the box that read: "Authentic Alaskan Native," and other labels reading "This model sold…Order yours now and Sizes and colors may vary."[18] According to Kelliher-Combs, the reactions to the installation varied. Some visitors took photos while others did not even approach the box.[19] Western culture has exhibited Indigenous people in the past, along the lines of a freak-show. In this case, an Alaska Native exhibited herself in order to demonstrate the immorality of this act. She also called into question authenticity and being an Alaska Native artist, how they are often regarded as exotic.

If the artist is indifferent, why is it important to have titles such as Sámi or Alaska Native artist? Why can't we refer to them as contemporary international or global artists? For Irene Snarby, curator at The Sámi Collections Museum, it is crucial to have such categorizations as Sámi art.[20] In an institutional setting, recognizing an artist as Sámi can strengthen a museum collection, raise funding or increase opportunities for new exhibits. In order to receive necessary funding, it is essential that a museum have a new theme when it is established, such as a Sámi art museum.

Glocal

In this study, I wanted to determine what was revealed in the art of two contemporary bicultural circumpolar artists. Was it obvious that these artists were both from northern regions of the world? In an age of globalization, does the local have a voice in Senungetuk's or Juliussen's art? Perhaps globalization has had a negative effect on the local. Meaning that globalization has made an artist's geographical location in the world arbitrary to their artistic production. Or maybe it has had the opposite effect and encouraged these artists to represent another form of expression, in an effort to avoid homogeneity?

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[17] SoNot is a group of Alaskan artists that grew from a frustration of lack of venues for experimental works. They visualize their activities outside any formal context, such as incorporating a nonprofit event or managing a gallery space. The group wants to create art that provokes joy as well as addressing serious issues. http://www.alaskawomenartists.org/seamster.html, 21.03.06

[18] Baechtel and Smith 28.8.05, p. D-8

[19] In order to find a photo of this work, I contacted Kelliher-Combs directly. Unfortunately she did not have a photo and according to her the work was not documented. Kelliher-Combs, e-mail correspondence, 17.04.06

[20] The Sámi Collections Museum (De Samiske Samlinger) is located in Karasjok, Norway. The museum owns over 730 artworks. The collection is primarily made up of Sámi art (*duodji* and contemporary), but includes artworks from other indigenous cultures as well, especially those from the circumpolar region.

Even though Norway and Alaska are part of the West, they are still rather isolated. Alaskans often feel detached from the rest of the continental United States, not only geographically but in spirit as well. Maybe this explains why Senungetuk may prefer to be referred to as an Alaskan artist as opposed to American artist. A critic once wrote that Alaska was a victim of the parenthesis crisis, the east and west coasts of the U.S. being each end of the parenthesis; making Alaska and Hawaii the outsiders. Geographically speaking, Norway has a similar situation in that it is separated from continental Europe. Even though continentally separated, both Norway and Alaska are influenced by (Alaska is ruled by) larger governments in the South. Norway is not a member of the European Union (EU), but as a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) follows the rules and regulations of the European Economic Association (EEA).

Geographically, Alaska has had significance in the global sense. Its regional influence has extended across the Bering Straight since the straight was covered with ice during the last Ice Age (approximately 11,000 years ago), allowing people to immigrate from Asia to North America. "Alaska's rather central position as both bridge and crossroads is crucial, for through this region passed groups and individuals who brought with them artifacts, ideas and esthetic systems […]."[21] Senungetuk witnessed cultural exchange as a boy in Wales, he writes:

> *Until 1945, Uelen Yupiit (Indigenous group from the Chuckchi region) visited Wales annually by skin boats. I was a young boy at Wales at that time. Ualit, as Wales Inupiat called them, came loaded with coveted ivory, prime summer coated reindeer skins, and other seemingly otherworldly Siberian goods. Some of the spotted reindeer skins ended in villages on the Yukon river, such as Nulato. The Russian Eskimos wanted flour, sugar, and anything else from the Wales Village Store. Sometimes, the American Diomede Inupiat were their intermediaries on their annual boat trips to Kotzebue or Nome. All of these people came over with their drums, specialty foods, and oral literature.*[22]

The sharing and exchange between cultures has occurred throughout time, yet within the past few decades, globalization has only further dissolved barriers of distance and collapsed geographic boundaries. Nearness represents the key characteristic of globalization, "the world's cultures, peoples and place are no longer distant and discrete from each other, but increasingly overlap through the movement of peoples and their cultural habits."[23]

[21] Fair 1993, p. 11
[22] Senungetuk 1993, pp. 5-6
[23] Ratnam 2004, p. 295

Clues to the artist's geographical origin have been referred to as "glocal" meaning, "Artworks with clues to the artist's geographical origin, clearly addressed to the avant-garde art world, have been dubbed 'glocal' - like an exotic flavour customized for international tastes."[24] Actually the terms "glocal" and "global" were not introduced until 1991 in *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words*. The word glocal implies the merging of the global and local, also referred to as global localization, deriving from business jargon. The concept can be traced to the Japanese *dochakuka,* which is a farming technique adapted to local conditions. In the 1990s it signified the adaptation of global market goods to local market conditions. Svein Bjørkås referred to the concept of "glocalisering" in Rapport 27, from the Norwegian Culture Council in 2001.[25] This concept involves the process of an Indigenous artist borrowing international and national cultural elements and combining them into local voice.[26] The artist's goal is not to return to the past, but to articulate tradition in a contemporary and subjective way. Thus the viewer is met with art which seems to express local versus global aspects. Is this what the globalization of art looks like?

Differentiating between the so-called local and global concepts represented in art can be a difficult process. Conceptual aspects found in the art are especially difficult to sort between global or local characteristics. Much of contemporary circumpolar art is international, but makes references to the local, for example the contemporary Alaskan Yup'ik artist Larry Beck. His artworks reflect Western art training and education, but they also speak of his Yup'ik heritage.[27] Beck creates animal masks using found objects such as hubcaps, auto mirrors, kitchen utensils and similar materials. He writes,

> *I am an Eskimo, but I'm also a 20th century American. I live in a modern city where my found materials come from junk yards, trash cans, and industrial waste facilities, since the ancient beaches where my ancestors found driftwood and washed-up debris from shipwrecks are no longer available to me, but my visions are mine, and even though I use Baby Moon hubcaps, pop rivets, snow tires, Teflon spatulas, dental pick mirrors, and stuff to make my spirits, this is a process to which the old artists could relate. Because, below these relics of your world, reside the old forces familiar to Inua.*[28]

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[24] Birnbaum 24.12.98
[25] Dunfjeld 2002, p. 70
[26] Ibid., p. 71
[27] Blackman and Hall 1988, p. 333
[28] Beck quoted in Ibid
Larry Beck received his BA in painting from the University of Washington in 1964 and his MFA in sculpture from the same institution the following year. Incidentally he has taught and lectured at universities throughout the western U.S. and in England.
In Iñupiaq mythology, *inua*, meaning "its person," refers to a sort of soul which exists in all people, animals, lakes, mountains and plants. Ray 1996, p. 176

In regard to the circumpolar region of the world, the stereotype of the local can be thought of as untamed nature, an abundance of wildlife (animals, flora and fauna), extremely long periods of either sunlight or darkness and short summers. Some Alaskan residents lightheartedly claim that there are only two seasons in Alaska, summer and winter. Juliussen's utilization of reindeer parts is a good example of the local, a material which is readily available to a reindeer herder. She is probably more apt to use reindeer remains than an artist from Los Angeles or New York.

Both use of material and conceptual aspects bestows Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art with a local flair. Thinking of a local flare as an exotic flavor is actually relatively accurate. In discussing international art versus ethnic art, Jimmie Durham states "Suppose we were not doing 'international' art, and were doing what must amount to 'ethnic' art instead? Entirely ridiculous and beside the point as well. Does that leave us doing art that has an accent?"[29] Here Durham is speaking more towards the difference between what divides Western and Indigenous (ethnic art) art, and that Indigenous art often falls outside of the Western art category. This way of thinking reminds one of the concept of glocal. From an international perspective, everything local makes the art seem unique and exotic.

Nature: The Unavoidable Art Historical Cliché?

The West has a tendency to link Indigenous peoples with nature. The traditional Sámi belief revolves around a nature religion and shamanism. Similar to *Inua* (see footnotes on previous page), all forms in nature had a spirit, such as a strange stone, a characteristic tree, a deep lake or a hill formation. One could request favors from these nature spirits if one worshiped and sacrificed to it.[30] Nature is a topic that often arises in discussion of contemporary circumpolar art. "In speaking of northern art, reference to the presence of nature has become a kind of unavoidable art historical cliché. However, nature, the landscape, inevitably shapes man - and man shapes the environment."[31] Thus when I started to analyze the artworks, I was apprehensive about discussing nature. I feared that this could have prevented Senungetuk's or Juliussen's work as being understood within a modern context. As Michael Rogin notes,

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[29] Durham 1994, p. 118
[30] Hætta 2002, p. 61
[31] Pelin 2003, p. 126

> *In the white fantasy, Indians remain in the oral stage, sustained by and unseparated from mother nature. They are at once symbols of a lost childhood bliss and, as bad children, repositories of murderous negative projections. Adult independence wreaks vengeance upon its own nostalgia for infant dependence. The Indian's tie with nature must be broken by uprooting him, figuratively by civilizing him, finally by killing him* […]. *In relation to Indians, whites regressed to the most primitive form of object relation, namely the annihilation of the object through oral introjection.*[32]

According to Rogin, the Native American's tie with nature represents incivility. From the beginning I wanted to avoid the nature cliché, yet it was precisely themes from nature (in their artwork) that initially struck me. The late Alaskan Tlingit artist James Schoppert once said, "My thinking is that all of the artform, (we call it art now) comes from that very strong mystical relationship with the land. If we don't address it […] then we're missing the point entirely."[33] Thus I believe that it must be discussed in regard to Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art.

There are obvious organic elements, unique to the circumpolar environment (such as arctic animals and the aurora borealis), present in both Senungetuk's and Juliussen's art. Senungetuk depicts images of animals and is continually inspired by forms in nature. Senungetuk denies that living in Alaska has made him particularly gifted at portraying nature.[34] Being that nature is such a large part of his art, both through use of medium and imagery, I found this surprising. One assumes that living in Alaska would make one inescapable from nature, which is something that interests Senungetuk and he is very familiar with. Perhaps his unique portrayal of nature is something that springs from his unconsciousness. In traditional Alaska Native art, animals and plant life were depicted in association with harvest for food. His portrayal of nature could be explained by influences from traditional art. Yet, the way in which he expresses nature is dependent upon his artistic training, education and personal experiences. However, it is important to recognize that Indigenous artists do not portray nature merely because this is the only thing they know. It is rather something that inspires them, like Senungetuk who grew up with a subsistence lifestyle, immersed in nature. Yet he no longer lives this way. People have a tendency to believe that being an Iñupiaq equates to a different lifestyle than non-Natives living in Alaska. In this respect Juliussen's background is perhaps more connected to nature, as she is a reindeer herder.

[32] Rogin quoted in Fisher 1992, p. 46
[33] Schoppert quoted in Fair 1993, p. 12 (Parentheses are written by Fair)
[34] Senungetuk, e-mail correspondence, 14.11.05

Interpretation Follows Context

Location potentially influences the artist and how an artwork is interpreted. The six main artworks by Juliussen and Senungetuk included in my study are all public works. What they have in common is that neither the Sámi nor the Alaska Native institution required that the pieces be created in the *duodji* or *suna* tradition. I believe this is only natural, since that they wanted to reflect the work of contemporary artists.

When I interviewed Juliussen, we discussed the problematic nature of the traditional Sámi material, reindeer. Technically, a medium that is available to anyone is actually restricted on a certain level because it is associated with Sámi tradition. One of Juliussen's influences, the Norwegian artist Erik Pisani (b.1961-), also incorporates reindeer remains in his art.[35] He works mainly with sound installations, wherein reindeer bones are beaten against once another.[36] According to Juliussen, Pisani avoids accusations of using reindeer remains in a non-conventional way because he is not a Sámi living in Karasjok. When reindeer remains are considered out of context, they inspire new meaning. Thus it can be argued that Juliussen inspires new meaning on two levels. Her art is inspirational because it reveals aesthetic qualities of the remains and it does this within the local Sámi community.

Use of Media and Access to Native Imagery

Identifying an artist as Indigenous, or as having a Native heritage, can possibly determine if they have rights to Native imagery. This is perhaps a more relevant argument in Alaska since some materials are legally restricted to Alaska Natives, in accordance with U.S. Fish and Game regulation, for example, walrus ivory (fresh ivory, not fossilized). In the past, Senungetuk has incorporated walrus ivory in his pieces. Senungetuk designed the door handles for the Supreme Court room in Anchorage, Alaska. The handles are a combination of wood and ivory (see fig. 34). What is unique about this piece is that Senungetuk did not modify the ivory. Here he emphasizes the aesthetic quality of the ivory but refrained from etching or coloring upon it. This is quite atypical of most Alaskan ivory art. Another example is the piece, *Bowl*, (1988) (see fig. 36, p. 68).

There are many unspoken rules as to who is allowed rights to Native imagery. For the past 400 years, Western culture has "selectively borrowed" aspects from Indigenous

[35] Juliussen, interview with the author, 19.04.05
[36] One of his pieces was exhibited in *Inderlighedens Spill*, an exhibition at the Lillehammer Art Museum (Lillehammer Kunstmuseum) in 1999, in conjunction with Norway's 1,000 year's festival.

cultures.[37] According to Asia Freeman, this causes traditional artists to feel that their culture is disrespected and devalued.[38] Freeman claims that the outsider does not take into consideration the creator's intent, but borrows the art based on aesthetic reasoning.[39] Certainly true in many situations, yet this should not be the only point of view.

In essence, as a global artist, Senungetuk borrows images and stories from Iñupiaq culture, transforming and updating them into a contemporary form of expression. Given that Senungetuk is Iñupiaq, he is allowed this right above other non-Native individuals. His participation in intercultural exchange is not called into question. The situation is different for artists who are merely working from a commercial standpoint. Take for example Yukie Adams, a Japanese artist who began producing Tlingit themed art after she married Tlingit artist Henry Adams in Anchorage in 1984. She also studied Northwest coastal Indian design under Marvin Oliver at the University of Washington. Her artist's bio states, "The mix of modernism and traditionalism in her work is her unique identity."[40] Taking this into consideration, does Yukie have a claim to Native iconography?

Figure 34: Ronald Senungetuk, Supreme Court Room Door Handles, 1973 Anchorage Courthouse

How do we decide who has a right to culture, doesn't cultural interchange occur all the time? Should artists such as Picasso, Matisse, Ernst, Pechstein, Nolde, Brancusi and others be criticized for incorporating masks, sculpture and other diverse genres from tribal African, Oceanic and American art? If a non-Indigenous person is interested in an Indigenous culture, should we deny them access to this culture bank? Blaming artists for borrowing from other cultures does not seem to be very productive, as far as art history is concerned. Maybe the trouble lies in the fact that artists borrow from other cultures without realizing or appreciating its meaning. Aldona Jonaitis, director of the University of Alaska Museum of the North in Fairbanks, says "They're (non-Native artists) stealing a precious commodity when they adopt Native imagery into their art. White artists have

[37] Gough 2000, p. 106
[38] Asia Freeman is an artist, director of Homer's Bunnell Street Gallery and University of Alaska (Anchorage) art instructor
[39] Baechtel and Smith 14.08.05, p. D-6
[40] Ibid

other options; they don't have to appropriate it. The only thing a lot of Native people have to sell is their culture."

Chapter 4: Circumpolar Exhibits

Does Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art, or rather their form of expression, reflect a common trend among contemporary Indigenous circumpolar art? The scope in this chapter is slightly wider, as other circumpolar artists are brought into discussion. Here I will discuss reasons for comparing circumpolar art, and look at how this has been done in specific exhibits. Both Juliussen and Senungetuk have played important roles in many contemporary exhibits, either by serving as curator or having works in the shows. The agendas of these exhibits seem somewhat varying. I will look more closely at two exhibits that assembled circumpolar art: *Arts from the Arctic* (1993) and *In the Shadow of the Midnight Sun* (2006), and two other exhibits with an Indigenous art theme: *Alaska 2005: Native Arts Now* and *Contemporary Sámi Art*[1] (1993). Since I have been unable to locate published literature regarding these exhibits, my observations are based upon the exhibit catalogues and by personally attending the *Alaska 2005: Native Arts Now* exhibit.

Why Compare Circumpolar Art?

A few different contemporary circumpolar art exhibits have been organized in the past. In order to develop a better understanding of artworks from the various northern regions, it is important to take a closer look at the agendas of these exhibits. The curator's task is vital because their choice of works ultimately decides what view of contemporary art is portrayed. They develop a theme by drawing connections between the artworks. When a curator selects more traditional artworks from the circumpolar region, this can reinforce the Western tendency to position "ethnic" arts outside of the modern experience.

Some have argued that it is problematic to compare contemporary circumpolar art. In an interview with the Norwegian art historian Hanna H. Hansen, Synnøve Persen[2] said:

> *The concept of Indigenous arts, as defining a sort of artistic community between Indigenous peoples from the entire world makes matters even more complicated and further excludes us from the Western art world. The concept of Indigenous art is a constructed community between people from the so-called fourth world because we have all been verbally and culturally oppressed and have not developed our own culture. Perhaps we are politically related, but artistically?*[3]

[1] Also referred to as *Dálá Sámi Dáidda: Samisk Nutidskonst*
[2] Synnøve Persen is a Norwegian Sámi artist (see footnotes p. 55)
[3] Persen quoted in Hansen 2004, p. 86

Persen sees similarities based on a political level, but not in terms of art. What begins as a comparison of art ends in a political discussion. Perhaps this is also based on a fear of exclusion, that contemporary artists are represented as "other."[4] There is a similar political framework surrounding circumpolar Indigenous artists, and the concept of Indigenous can be excluding. This is why I believe it is important to investigate the implications of various artist titles. Indigenous peoples from the circumpolar region are united by means of being a minority culture, challenged by postcolonialism (the 'us' versus 'them' attitude). Artists, especially in Alaska, have been conflicted by controversial rights to Alaska Native imagery and media, not to mention the argument of fine art versus handicrafts. It is easy to become enveloped in postcolonial theory when one studies Indigenous art.

In contradiction to Persen's argument, I find a likeness on the artistic level as well. Similarities, within circumpolar arts, are typically based upon resilient minority cultures and their continuation of tradition. However, artists also take advantage of the freedom that artistic expression provides. They are inspired by two culture banks, regional and international developments in art. Some exhibits have focused on the similar ties found in the circumpolar region. Typically, northern Indigenous peoples have strong ties to nature, animals and religious beliefs.[5] There is also a similar means of livelihood, for example found in reindeer herding, hunting and fishing. Most Indigenous literature focuses upon traditional religion, specifically how the ancient ways of shamanism have shaped people's way of thinking, seeing and creating art.

Arts from the Arctic, 1993

This traveling exhibit was the first major assemblage of contemporary circumpolar art and hosted 100 individual artworks. The proposal was introduced in 1978 by the Universal Council of Folk Trades at the International Conference in Kyoto, Japan.[6] Fifteen years later, the exhibit was finally actualized, indicating changes in the world. It opened in Russia, proving a weakening of the iron curtain, which had previously separated northern peoples.

All artists had an Indigenous background and were from five different circumpolar regions: Russia, Scandinavia, Canada, Alaska and Greenland. The exhibit's

[4] Non-Western cultures and peoples
[5] Karvonen-Kannas 2003, pp. 8-9
[6] Ivanova-Unarova 1993, p. 5

main objective was to "create impulses and to underline the particular features of the Arctic peoples, to throw light on their likeness and their differences."[7] Additionally, the exhibit hoped to present art from the Arctic to other regions of the world. Senungetuk was very active in this show, serving both as guest curator and as the Alaska representative on the exhibit committee. He also had two pieces in the show. Senungetuk writes, "It is important to focus on our living arts. Through this vision we can learn to appreciate ourselves more."[8]

I have examined two different versions of the catalogue; one was printed in Harstad, Norway, the other in Fairbanks, Alaska. The Alaskan example is much more extensive than the Norwegian version, which was translated from Russian to English. It includes more photos of artworks and has a comprehensive background on Alaska Native art. The two versions give different impressions of circumpolar art. The shorter Norwegian catalogue, unlike the Alaskan version, does not give the impression of contemporary circumpolar art as particularly modern, at least not in the Western sense. It could be a coincidence, or perhaps the curators from the five countries had different intentions for the exhibit.

The show was described as an exhibit of modern art from the Polar Arctic, however most pieces appeared more traditional, resembling handicraft objects. The exhibit seemed to focus more on decorative applied crafts and folklore motifs. Without directly mentioning it, the catalogue exhibited both traditional art and fine art objects. Today some argue that traditional art and fine art are one in the same. Perhaps this is acceptable, but the issue should at least be mentioned in the catalogue. This is somewhat similar to the discrepancy in the exhibits *Magiciens de la terre* and *"Primitivism" in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (These exhibits will be discussed in chapter five). There was no mention of outside influences (outside of the Arctic) or that the artist portrays a unique story in their art. The comparison seemed to stay within the bounds of the Arctic region:

> *Inspite* [sic] *of the fact that the artists of the Arctic are separated by the huge spaces and unequal conditions of the social and economic life, they have much in common. First of all-it is a unity of a* [sic] *man with the Nature. Then it is a devotion for the traditions of the ancestors. And the high educational level of the peoples* […]. *Fathers and grandfathers of modern artists were fishermen, hunters, reindeer-breeders. The majority of artists today tries* [sic] *to keep that traditional*

[7] Ivanova-Unarova 1993, p. 5
[8] Senungetuk 1993, p. 7

> *way of life of their ancestors, that to feel and to comprehend the culture of their own nation more profoundly.*[9]

By focusing on ancestral traditional, there is a feeling of a retelling of the past or a curatorial rediscovery of lost culture. Both Juliussen and Senungetuk are highly educated/trained artists who use nature as a theme in their work, but how strong are these ties to the traditions of their ancestors? Perhaps one could argue this applies to Senungetuk as he promotes Old Bering Sea art, where his quest is based upon an obligation to his ancestors. Yet I believe that his concern is the state of contemporary Alaska Native art. He hopes to change the way people view Alaska Native art, while at the same time influencing other artists to develop their own voice, by persuading them to leave commercial art behind. In Juliussen's case, art is her own story and not directly related to her ancestors.

The Norwegian catalogue also mentions that the clothes of the Arctic peoples are rich in different kinds of fur and deer hide, seal and glass beads.[10] Here I am assuming traditional clothing, yet the catalogue neglects to mention this. Such claims may be true, but can also be somewhat problematic. It gives the impression that Indigenous peoples stick to their traditions by creating handicrafts and have not entered into modern society. One is led to believe that Arctic Indigenous people never travel and only resort to materials they have on hand. This is fine, but credit should also be given to artists like Juliussen and Senungetuk who break boundaries and expand upon tradition. Fortunately the Alaska catalogue draws attention to the fact that Senungetuk does not feel restricted to traditional art, even though he has encountered such reaction, "A lot of people who are like you [Iñupiat] ought to be where they are at! Be ivory carvers. That's what you're good at- your traditions!"[11] Perhaps this type of remark confirms that some people are afraid of change. Despite this, tradition can also be viewed as a dynamic process wherein new work and ideas create new traditions.[12] Senungetuk stands for self-development. He says, "I do not want to be controlled by others. I do not want people to tell me to make ivory carvings like the ones I made in Wales."[13]

Canadian artist Elizabeth Angrnaqquaq had a wall hanging in the show entitled, *Scene from traditional times* (1992). It was described as a reminder of "the naïve world of

[9] Ivanova-Unarova 1993, p. 5
[10] Ibid
[11] Senungetuk quoted in Fair 1993, p. 14
[12] Ibid., p. 19
[13] Senungetuk, e-mail correspondence, 04.04.06

clean innocent child's soul," which is a kind of statement that seems to romanticize the past.

Many of the pieces in the show incorporated traditional organic materials, such as walrus ivory, baleen, reindeer antler and soap stone. It is interesting how the artists used these materials. Some of the pieces seem reminiscent of art as commodity, something that is an ongoing problem in Alaska. Artists often create pieces to satisfy market demands, knowing they will sell. A few of the pieces appeared similar to what would be sold in a tourist shop in Anchorage (see fig. 35). Please note that my intension is not to make a value judgment, claiming that traditional handicraft pieces are bad art while modern art is good. These pieces are amazing and depict skill, but should they be considered fine art objects? This is an ongoing debate in both Alaska and Norway.[14]

Figure 35: Tom Tiulana, *Raven Dancer King Island Dancer and Walrus Dancer*

Senungetuk's piece, *Bowl* (1988), was unique compared to other pieces in this exhibit in its non-traditional appearance (see fig. 36).[15] It is an oval shaped bowl, made of teak and has two ivory pieces extending across the opening. Except for the incorporation of ivory, I do not believe that this piece gives us obvious clues to the creator's residence, as many of the other works do. In the catalogue, however, there was no attention drawn to the fact that Senungetuk incorporated ivory without carving on it. Instead the focus was directed to the Chikchi bone-carvers talent, who are famous for their colored ivory engravings. For example the Yakut masters who carve different mini sculptures like chess pieces, caskets and the decorations on mammoth tusks.[16] Senungetuk's bowl appears contemporary and perhaps context-less. However, it also has another dimension in his use of ivory, which can be linked to his Native heritage.

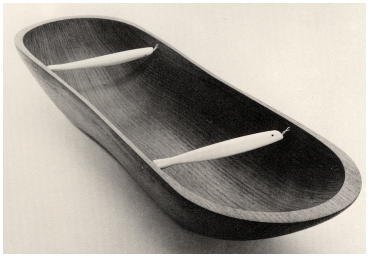

Figure 36: Ronald Senungetuk, *Bowl*, 1988

The Norwegian catalogue does not mention the artist as having their own voice, and I find this fascinating. The catalogue states that these "modern" artists are greatly

[14] For more info on this topic see: Baechtel and Smith 21.08.05 and Jangås 14.09.02
[15] Senungetuk also had a wooden panel piece in the show titled *Caribou*.
[16] Ivanova-Unarova 1993, p. 5

influenced by ancient customs, traditions and religions, but makes no reference of a modern voice. One could also have drawn attention to the artist's struggle for self-definition and identity. Maybe this exhibit made the mistake of creating a kind of blanket statement for all contemporary circumpolar artists. I hope that future catalogues focus more on the artist's individual telling of their own story, a trend which can be found in recent exhibits.

Alaska 2005: Native Arts Now

The *Native Arts Now* show was a collection of contemporary Alaska Native art and was held on display at the Kenai Visitors and Cultural Center in Kenai, Alaska from May until September 2005. Senungetuk was guest curator and I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to attend *Native Arts Now*. This exhibit focused on the "now," which is enforced in the title, rather than nostalgia for the past. I believe that Senungetuk's agenda, as is reflected in this exhibit, denotes a more accurate account of the current art scene in Alaska. The fact that contemporary Alaska Native art is based on the artist's own individual experiences, and that Indigenous art is never static: "Traditions always change in order to remain traditions."[17] This exhibit exemplified the fact that certain Alaska Native artists still practice traditionally, while others exercise a completely new voice. Since there is little written about these artists, the catalogue is a valuable source of information, as it provided background information on each featured artist. It seems that the artists creating more "non-traditional" works have often received art education/training, exhibited, worked or traveled outside of Alaska. Taking into account Senungetuk's art and background, it is no surprise that he encourages progression in Alaska Native art.

Figure 37: Mary Jane Anuqsraaq Melovidov, *Going Home*, 2003

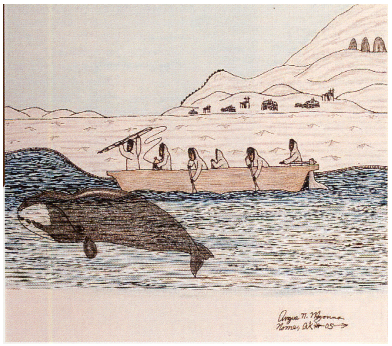

Figure 38: Angus W. Mazonna, *Kayak Hunters*, 2004

When exhibits have a Native theme, the Indigenous artists are typically portrayed as exotic

[17] Senungetuk 2005, p. 3

people who have special relation to nature. Instead of focusing on the artist's heritage, this exhibit concentrated on the artists' individual form of expression. Senungetuk writes, "Regardless of formal study or not, the broad artistic regions now have contemporary artists who are celebrated internationally as well as regionally. There is no turning back with new trends in the Arctic."[18] Many of the works incorporate traditional organic materials such as animal skin, grass, fur and wood, but often in a contemporary way. However, we still encounter works by a few artists which are more "stereotypical Alaska." It is difficult to decide whether it is fitting to refer to these pieces are more traditional, in comparison to the "modern" works. One method I have used to differentiate between the two, are decorative versus conceptual works. The works that seem more traditional are often decorative or pictorial landscape paintings. Consider for example, *Going Home* by the Iñupiaq artist Mary Jane Anuqsraaq Melovidov (see fig. 37). Here we see a hunter with his dog in the foreground, an igloo depicted on the horizon and the aurora borealis dancing in the sky. Another example of a traditional piece is *Kayak Hunters* (2004), by the Iñupiaq artist Angus W. Mazonna (see fig. 38), where a whaling scene is depicted. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that these two artists have never received any formal training or art education. Mary Jane Anuqsraaq Melovidov trained herself in the arts through observation. She was also influenced by her family.[19] Her granduncles, Kivetoruk James Moses and George Aden Ahgupuk, were both well-known Alaskan artists. When she was a teenager, she promised her uncle that she would carry on the traditions of her Iñupiaq family's artwork. She has kept to her promise by teaching and demonstrating her skills.[20] Angus W. Mazonna, on the other hand, is inspired by the everyday life in the arctic and the nature that surrounds him. He was "Raised by his family in a subsistence way of living, he watched his father and friends draw on the skins of rabbits, seal, walrus, and polar bear they hunted."[21] Bearing in mind the dissimilarities between these various artists' backgrounds, one soon realizes how the term Alaska Native or Indigenous art encompasses a very broad range of art.

Kelliher-Combs is an excellent example of a contemporary Alaskan artist who defies the stereotypes surrounding traditional Alaska Native art. Her works include abstract mixed media paintings and sculptural pieces. The piece *14 Red Seal Skin Secrets* (2005) is a mixed media composition composed of acrylic polymer, dyed sealskin and

[18] Senungetuk 2005, p. 3
[19] Woodward and Tarbox 2005, p. 23
[20] Ibid
[21] Ibid., p. 22

fabric (see fig. 39). This piece has a mysterious sensual quality, the deep red color seem womb-like and thus reminiscent of *Horn'Portal.* Her work has also been compared to Eva Hesse's.[22] According to Kelliher-Combs, this piece depicts a secret, which is "something hidden, unspoken, repressed and kept unknown."[23] Both Juliussen and Kelliher-Combs are fascinated with the skin medium. Kelliher-Combs says, "My process dialogues the relationship of the work to the skin, the surface by which an individual is mediated in culture."[24] Kelliher-Combs, akin to Juliussen, expresses the aesthetic quality of mundane materials: sealskin, gut and walrus stomach, "I had them hanging in my studio, and the gut and the walrus stomach, especially, were so beautiful to me. The stomach was really just luminous, the way it caught the light."[25] Some key issues that Kelliher-Combs contemplates in her art are: Western/Alaska Native culture, self/other and man/nature. In order to tackle these dualisms Kelliher-Combs incorporates a number of different media: synthetic, organic, traditional and modern materials. Note that Kelliher-Combs is influenced by Western artists from her undergraduate studies at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks and post-graduate work at the University of Arizona.[26]

Figure 39: Sonya Kelliher-Combs, *14 Red Seal Skin Secrets*, 2005

Perry Eaton's heritage is Alutiiq. They are a people with a tradition of mask making, who believe that masks connect them to their ancestors and homeland (Kodiak Island). Eaton's masks can be regarded as an exploration of contemporary themes through traditional Alutiiq plank mask making. Consider for example *Messenger Bird* (2003) (see fig. 40). According to Eaton, this mask is influenced by Alutiiq mythology, "Birds are the messengers between the past, present and future. They also crossed worlds and spirits. Because of the lengthiness of its head this particular bird would have been carrying a significant voice. Such a mask would have been burned after the dance or ritual it was involved in."[27] *Messenger Bird* appears more traditional than Kelliher-Combs' piece, and

[22] Woodward and Tarbox 2005, p. 20
[23] Kelliher-Combs, e-mail correspondence, 16.03.06
[24] Kelliher-Combs quoted in Woodward and Tarbox 2005, p. 20
[25] Kelliher-Combs quoted in Baechtel 06.03.05, p. A-19
[26] Woodward and Tarbox 2005, p. 20
[27] Eaton, e-mail correspondence, 18.03.06

was inspired by an Alutiiq mask in the Smithsonian collection.[28] Eaton has exhibited internationally and has, for example, a permanent piece at the French National Museum in Boulogue-Sur-Mer, France.

Kathleen Carlo's piece in this show was a mask titled *Henaaye* (2003) (see fig. 41). She is an Athabascan artist who often creates masks which are abstract and modern. There are only a few remaining examples of Athabascan masks, and they are approximately a hundred years old. These few examples are the only evidence of Athabascan masks, so Carlo had no one to learn from. Normally mask making is a traditional activity, taught generation to generation. According to Carlo, this has given her masks a new dimension, since she has not been restricted by tradition.[29]

Figure 40: Perry Eaton, *Messenger Bird*, 2003

Senungetuk did not have any works in this show, but I think his perspective on Alaska Native art created a very fascinating show. Considering the variety of these artworks, makes one realize that it is difficult, and probably incorrect, to categorize contemporary Indigenous art as one homogenous group. Conceivably, these artists are all influenced by tradition in one way or another. Yet on the other hand, each artist uniquely presents their art in a contemporary form of expression. Rather than simply rendering the past, I believe this is a more correct approach to contemporary Indigenous art. Reminding people that tradition is not static, but continually changing. Hence, contemporary art reflects that traditions have not been lost, merely transformed.

Figure 41: Kathleen Carlo, *Henaaye*, 2003

In The Shadow of the Midnight Sun, 2006

This exhibit was on display from January 14th until May 7th, 2006 at the Art Gallery of Hamilton in Canada (Ontario). The title, *In the Shadow of the Midnight Sun,* is taken from a book of contemporary Sámi prose and poetry edited by Harald Gaski (1996). Exhibit curator, Jean Blodgett writes, "They are far enough away, in their land of the midnight

[28] The Smithsonian is located in Washington D.C. and is the world's largest museum complex and research organization.
[29] Woodward and Tarbox 2005, p. 10

sun, to retain an element of romantic exoticness for many people."[30] According to the exhibit catalogue, this is the first time Sámi and Inuit art have been shown together since *Arts from the Arctic*. Blodgett requested a piece by Juliussen for the show, but at the same time Juliussen was occupied with another exhibit titled *HORNverk* (March 2006) in Trondheim. In order to focus her attention to the Trondheim exhibition, she was forced to withdrawal from the show.[31]

I find it strange that the catalogue states: "The intention of this exhibit was to show recent work by Sami and Inuit artists, not necessarily make comparisons between the two. However, their juxtaposition-purposely displayed side by side in the exhibition-invites at least an attempt at comparison."[32] This seems to be a confusing statement, since a comparison is of course automatically invited. Such an exhibit can only inspire the viewer to compare or connect along the lines of traditional culture, size of works, media or content. Or perhaps the viewer will construct associations based on a similarity of religion, language, lifestyle or politics.

Similar to *Native Arts Now*, the goal was to show the current state of Inuit and Sámi art, rather than assembling a historically based presentation. Therefore the exhibit designated a time frame of artworks made between 2000 and 2005.[33] Many of the works in this show seem to reflect contemporary international or global artists. I believe that the agenda of this exhibit is a sign of the increasing trend to show the modern aspects of circumpolar art.

Dálá Sámi Dáidda: Samisk Nutidskonst: Contemporary Sámi Art, 1993

This exhibit was held at The Nordic Arts Center in Sveaborg, Finland. Here we encounter yet another agenda, in comparison to the three previous exhibits. This exhibit purposely refrained from showing traditional handicrafts and instead focused on what they refer to as the "pictorial arts." My understanding of this term equates to contemporary fine art, as opposed to traditional art. Until now we have seen handicrafts exhibited alongside fine art pieces. This expression is conceivably a term utilized to avoid the dilemma of differentiating between *duodji* and *dáidda.* The Nordic Arts Center illustrated some of these difficulties in 1981 with an exhibit called *Sámi Dáidda*. This touring show was

[30] Blodgett 2006 (*Midnight Sun* catalogue), p. 2
[31] Juliussen, phone conversation, 28.03.06
[32] Blodgett 2006 (*Midnight Sun* catalogue), p. 1
[33] Ibid., p. 6

organized to demonstrate the relationship between modern art and traditional Sámi handicrafts, but focused mostly on handicrafts and ethnography.[34]

According to the curators of the 1993 show, Sámi art has become internationalized with references to the local. Many of these artists, in regard to tradition, portray organic forms in an unconventional way. While Sámi art becomes more and more influenced by the rest of the world, artists still remain conscious of their origins and some still practice in the traditions of *duodji.* There are of course always exceptions. We must be aware that each artist is telling their own story.

Juliussen's piece, *Floss på staur* (1991) was exhibited in the show (see fig. 42). This piece was very tactile and involved contrast. Two sculptural forms were juxtaposed seeming to suggest some sort of dialogue. Her piece accurately expressed the concept of simplified form and organic material, as did two other women artists in the show, Rose-Marie Huuva and Ingunn Utsi.

Figure 42: Aslaug Juliussen, *Floss på staur*, 1991

The close relationship with traditional materials such as hide, bone and pewter, are brought to attention in this exhibit. Indigenous artists, as I mentioned earlier, use organic materials, but Alaska Native artists often act upon them whereas Sámi artists portray the materials in their natural state. Berndt Arell, the director of this exhibition claims that the materials are often the dominating factor of the art and that the artist is constantly "striving towards a simplified visual language." Perhaps it is an abstract simplified language that bestows contemporary Indigenous art with a global or international quality.

[34] Arell, 1993

Chapter 5: Formulating an Approach

Eli Høydalsnes has outlined four possible methods for analyzing "local" or "regional" art, such as Alaska Native or Sámi art. In my opinion, it is important to discuss the various ways, as outlined by Høydalsnes, in order to better understand Indigenous art. Moreover, I hope this will help explain my approach to Alaska Native and Sámi art. I will not make value judgments or assess which way is better, but rather develop a method which best suits my discussion of Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art.

Firstly, Høydalsnes says one can study art within the "larger art history," which I interpret as Western art history.[1] According to Høydalsnes, this means discussing art in an authoritative way by using conventional literature, as well as Western concepts and methods. She deems this method as hardly productive. Høydalsnes argues that everything which does not fit under the norm, is determined as regressive, bizarre or exotic, depending upon the author's professional position. The main problem with this approach is that one adheres to a norm, which is constructed for other cultures, societies and historical circumstances. Høydalsnes maintains that this results in a reiteration of conventional art history within society's conventions, possibly having cultural colonialism and exoticism as an eventual side effect.[2]

A second method is to use an authoritative art historical approach, both theoretically and methodically, but not normatively.[3] In other words, this means creating a local art history, while at the same time considering the art's functional, historical and socio-cultural context. According to Høydalsnes, this approach results in a local or regional art history that follows conventional standards,[4] but uses the art's own historical, aesthetic and iconographical premises as a starting point. She claims that this approach often presents interesting and insightful literature. It also avoids regression and exoticism, which are typically problems associated with the use of a foreign norm on a local material. However, it does not challenge or deconstruct Western art history.[5]

A third approach is to write "counter histories." One searches for reasons why Western art history and its conventions are inaccurate in describing local art. This attempts to reveal Western art history's flaws and weaknesses. Following this approach,

[1] Høydalsnes 1999, p. 84
[2] Ibid., p. 85
[3] Ibid
[4] Here referred to as Western art history
[5] Høydalsnes 1999, p. 85

one must focus on all the aspects of the art which do not fit within the authoritative historical approach. In this situation, criticism is often fueled by an underlying desire to be added to Western art history. As maintained by Høydalsnes, this method can be productive and contribute to new knowledge. She claims that counter histories tend to have a binary attitude where roles of "us" versus "them" within Western art history are reversed.[6] This implies that one accepts Western art history's theoretical, conceptual and methodical approach.

A fourth possibility is to write something with a completely different approach. In this circumstance, one does not employ authoritative categorization or classification (of genre, style or quality) within the established art history. Unlike the three previously mentioned approaches, Høydalsnes remarks that she is unaware of anyone who has attempted to use this method on local art history.[7]

To avoid existing stereotypes of circumpolar art, I find it most productive to discuss Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art from a Western art historical perspective. This seems logical given that both artists have received formal art training and education from a Western point of view, they also have a Western agenda. Both create works intended for public institutions, gallery exhibits and permanent collections. From the beginning, their art is recognized as "art for art's sake" and is not questioned as being handicraft. Although I regard their art from this perspective, I do not believe that drawing attention to local aspects makes the artwork exotic, as suggested by Høydalsnes. Nor is it my intention to assume an "us" versus "them" attitude. This is why I do not seek to oppose nor defy the art historical canon. Yet at the same time, it is important to pay attention to local aspects, as both artists have one foot in another culture.

Juliussen is a "Sámi-Norwegian," this is the way Jørgen Lund describes the artist Iver Jåks. Such artists can therefore be interpreted from two different standpoints. Yet what is the Sámi standpoint if the art is not related to *duodji*? Lund also questions that of being an outsider. Is there a hidden meaning found in Sámi art that we as outsiders cannot understand?[8] I believe that this type of attitude makes the artwork exotic and causes Sámi art to remain a "touchy" area. Lund claims that within Sámi art, characterizing or name giving can be authoritative, because it is an exercise of power: "Even though we consider

[6] Høydalsnes 1999, pp. 85-6
[7] Ibid., p. 86
[8] Lund 2002, p. 124

and discuss art openly, the concept of art is not something Sámi."[9] This may be true of traditional Sámi art, but I believe this claim is not appropriate in regard to contemporary Sámi art. In reference to Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art, I disagree with Lund. In this case, Lund does not directly specify what art is. Thus one must assume that he means the concept of art in the Western sense. What it really comes down to is what the role of artist is. According to the Finnish Sámi artist, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, the Sámi people have always had artists: "For the Sámi everything was art, and all the Sámi were artists."[10] After reading Lund, one is left wondering who to believe.

Orientalism

Postcolonial theory and cultural colonialism are concepts that can be used when discussing Sámi art.[11] Critics have often focused on the political aspects of Sámi art when choosing a theory. This is mainly due to all the postcolonial issues associated with this field of study. Using postcolonialism as a starting point can easily foreshadow a political discussion, and perhaps displace the focus from the art itself. This is something I have attempted to avoid, because it does not seem to be a matter of concern, in light of modern contemporary art.

Eli Høydalsnes writes, "Sámi art has a modest, but an apparent position within a postcolonial frame of interpretation."[12] In this instance, it is important to recognize what she considers as Sámi art. Her focus is not on contemporary art, but on the widespread stereotypes surrounding traditional Sámi art, such as images depicted on the Sámi shamans' drum (called *runebommen*), as well as decoration and ornamentation found on jewelry, clothing and religious paraphernalia.[13] She claims that ethnicity is a label for anything that is not from the West. Similar to the acclaimed theorist Edward Said, who I will discuss shortly, Høydalsnes believes that society formulates ideas about "other," in order to legitimize their own social boarders and individual identities.

Postcolonialism is a very serious issue and should be mentioned, as it is a part of Alaska Native and Sámi history. Yet I do not believe that it corresponds with my study of Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art. I do not consider their art within a postcolonial form of interpretation. Approaching their art with this type of attitude seems very passé. As I

[9] Lund 2002, p. 124
[10] Valkeapää quoted in Pelin 2003, p. 114
[11] Høydalsnes 2003, p. 119
[12] Ibid
[13] Ibid., p. 214

write this statement, I realize that Senungetuk's art does in fact have a correlation with colonialism. His pursuit to promote Alaska Native pre-contact art, by updating it into a contemporary artform, is a kind of political agenda. Essentially he is giving life to an art form that was devastated by colonialism. Even though a relationship exists, I do not believe that postcolonialism, as a central theme, is fitting in my investigation of his art. When two artists break free of existing stereotypes and conventions, why launch another political discussion?

Although I have chosen not to discuss postcolonialism, does not mean that it is not present in today's society. Hanna H. Hansen, who has written a master's thesis on contemporary Sámi art writes, "[…] postcolonialism can give the impression that we live in a period after colonialism. This is of course not true."[14] In fact, globalization, which has an underlying role throughout this dissertation, has been blamed as an accelerator of colonization.

> *The unchecked expansion of European nations since the sixteenth century has signaled over 400 years of significant change for the world's Indigenous peoples. This process of colonization did not end with the arrival of European people but persisted as European good, European technology and European beliefs perpetuated the process of invasion. Globalization threatens to accelerate this process of colonization.*[15]

Edward Said and his writings on *Orientalism* have a central position within postcolonial theory, a field that was initiated with his book *Orientalism* in 1978. This publication, along with *Culture and Imperialism*, published in 1993, explores how postcolonial theory applies in relation to the West's history of empire and colonization. The theory's underlying idea was a way of coming to terms with the Orient and the basic distinction between the East and the West. In *Orientalism*, Said discusses Western imperialism in relation to the Islamic East, through an analysis of various written materials such as political documents, narratives and theatrical plays. In terms of art history, Said's theory challenged the traditional art historical approach to "Orientalist art," which is understood as European art representing the East. Romanticized European paintings (of the East) became the Western "image" of the East. Therefore this "image" is not real, but merely a phenomenon. To illustrate this, he used Flaubert's paintings as an

[14] Hansen 2004, p. 4
[15] Smith, Burke and Ward 2000, p. 1

example. Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan resulted in a model of a "typical Oriental woman."[16]

Said writes, "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences."[17] The "Orient" is essentially a geographical sector comprising the Islamic world: North Africa and the Middle East, from Turkey to Israel and Iran. Said claims that the concept was born during the time period where there was a particular closeness between Britain, France and the Orient (roughly during the late eighteenth century).[18] The two man-made entities are the "Orient" and the "Occident" (Britain, France and America), which support and reflect one another. Said writes,

> *The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea personality, experience* […] *Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient- dealing with it by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient*.[19]

Since it is based upon nineteenth century and early twentieth century European colonialism, it seems relatively dated in relation to my discussion of contemporary art. Said's theory could be used to explain why Western art history has excluded traditional Indigenous art, but it falls outside the discussion of contemporary art.

Primitivism

Robert Goldwater published his book *Primitivism in Modern Art* in 1938. Goldwater argued that *primitivism* was a phenomenon initiated in the 1800s, and gained media hype with Picasso and his colleagues around 1906-7. After this period the debate of primitivism adjourned. Subsequently, during the 1980s, two epic exhibits renewed the debate about the Western modern art movement and visual cultures of the rest of the world.[20] I will discuss these two exhibits to emphasize why primitivism does not coincide with my discussion of Juliussen and Senungetuk. It does however raise interesting questions regarding fine art versus handicraft. As we have seen, both of these issues are comparable to Indigenous circumpolar art, specifically the relationship between traditional art and a modern form of expression.

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[16] Said 1978, p. 6
[17] Ibid., p. 1
[18] Ibid., pp. 3-4
[19] Ibid., pp. 136-7 (Said's parentheses)
[20] Fisher 1992, p. 44

The exhibits, *"Primitivism" in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1983) at the MOMA in New York and *Magiciens de la terre* (1989) at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, made an effort to break down the boundaries of primitive art. The second show was held in response to the first exhibit. According to Thomas McEvilley, until the *"Primitivism"* exhibit, the question of what is art had stopped being asked.[21] This was an exhibit where so-called primitive objects were displayed in a Western art context. A number of issues arose in conjunction with these exhibits, such as the cultural origin of the artists, the legacy of the colonial relationship between the West and the non-West and the notion of "otherness."

Rather than forcing these objects into Western categories, the exhibit raised questions about the Western system and revealed its weaknesses. Similar to how critics have explained circumpolar Indigenous art, as an outsider, in regard to Western art. Both exhibits received widespread criticism. McEvilley claims that many critics seemed to have forgotten what the exhibits strove to do. Rightwing critics said these exhibits were destroyers of Modernism, and that the curators had given up the Western claim of being a more advanced civilization. While leftist critics claimed that the exhibits were depoliticized and brought up the tradition of French colonialism.[22] However, this was the first major exhibition of its kind, to knowingly attempt to discover a postcolonistic way to exhibit art objects together. Today, McEvilley deems these exhibits as a major landmark in the social history of art. Both exhibits, each in their own way attempted to break down the confines of so-called primitive art, thus paving the way for future generations of artists. At the *Magiciens de la terre* exhibit, no hierarchies were established. Fifty Western works were exhibited together with fifty non-Western works. Third world works were treated just like the Western ones. The *"Primitivism"* show went even further, the artworks were left undated and anonymous.[23] The Magiciens catalogue left things unexplained, while the Primitivism show came outfitted with a huge catalogue enforcing the curator's view of the show. When art such as Juliussen's and Senungetuk's disagrees with the current method of interpretation or understanding, one must assume that a new method must be developed to account for these changes. Only then will existing stereotypes of circumpolar art be challenged and disproved.

[21] McEvilley 1992, pp. 130-31
[22] Ibid., pp. 156-7
[23] Ibid., p. 156

Institutional Theory of Art

I choose to study Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art from a libertarian, nonrepressive and nonmanipulative perspective, as I do not view their art within a postcolonial context. The institutional theory of art can therefore be recognized as a contemporary alternative to the theory of Orientalism. I stumbled upon this theory when reading *The Global Art World Inc.* by Charlotte Bydler. Her remarks inspired me to further investigate and employ the institutional theory of art. The instatement of this theory indicates that art has become a kind of social practice. I found the institutional theory of art to be a good starting point, when considering the implications of titles such as global and Indigenous artist. It can also be used as a method to understand Juliussen's "natural readymades." Bydler writes,

> *The fact that the author has identified himself* [Jimmie Durham] *as a Native American artist draws attention to the exclusionary art world practices, such as the discriminating use of the ethnic categories. Contemporary Cherokee artists may be called global, but are more rarely referred to in plain terms as contemporary international artists. To explain this, we need to look at contemporary and international art in institutional art theory.*[24]

Bydler also draws on a quote by Jimmie Durham, "A friend of mine said that art is a European invention."[25] Bydler seems to be questioning whether or not the artworld is exclusionary, through the discriminating use of ethnic categories. Unfortunately, Bydler does not further develop this claim, thus, I am forced to speculate on what her implications are. She bases her claim on an article written by Michele Robecchi in *Flash Art.*[26] The article was a review of Jimmie Durham's silent movie titled *Pursuit of Happiness* (2003). The film chronicles the rise of Joe Hill, a fictitious Native American artist who rises to the top after having exhibited a series of works made from trash he collected along Highway 61.[27] Bydler draws attention to the fact that this article was found in the "global art" section of the publication, as opposed to the "international section." It may seem somewhat absurd for Bydler to base such a significant claim from one single example, again why I was wanted to further investigate the intuitional theory of art. Through this investigation, I wanted to determine whether or not the contemporary artworld had exclusionary tendencies. Thus explaining why Juliussen and Senungetuk may prefer to have titles such as global or international artist, as opposed to Indigenous.

[24] Bydler 2004, p. 181 (My brackets)
[25] Durham quoted in Ibid., p. 180
[26] Robecchi 2003, p. 143
[27] Ibid

In his article entitled, *The Art World* (1964), the American theorist Arthur C. Danto introduced a new theory in art philosophy. Danto developed this theory to explain what makes something art. This theory can be useful in order to comprehend how a seemingly commonplace object can be understood as a work of art, for example "readymades." Beginning with the time of Socrates, Danto explores how theories are developed to understand art. He argues that in Socrates' time, art was recognized as an imitation of reality. In order to comprehend art from this period, Danto developed an argument which he refers to as the Imitation Theory of Art (IT). This argument explains art where the art's ultimate goal is imitation.[28] Of course Socrates' auditors knew what art was and what they liked, yet Danto formulated this theory in order to assist us in our understanding of the term art and how it has been continually transforming throughout time. Danto notes that something that is understood as art at one given time, may not be later on. Here he quotes a "recent writer" (without mentioning his/her name) "[…] to separate those objects which are works of art from those which are not, because […] we know how correctly to use the word 'art' and to apply the phrase 'work of art'."[29]

Since artists from Socrates' time and long after were engaged with imitation, the insufficiency of this theory was not recognized until the invention of photography.[30] Around this time, the once "constructive" theory was unable to accept post-impressionist paintings as art. As in science, when the old hypothesis has been proven wrong, one has to formulate a new one in order to accommodate for new facts. While at the same time, account for what the older theory did. For instance, at this point in art history, no art was to be transferred out of the *musée des beaux-arts.* Rather, objects such as post-impressionist paintings, along with masks, weapons, etc. from the anthropological museums were transferred in.[31] Danto refers to this new hypothesis as the Reality Theory (RT), wherein art does not intend to imitate reality, but depicts reality itself. According to Danto, "it is in terms of RT that we must understand artworks today."[32] Considering post-impressionist paintings in terms of the Reality Theory seems reasonable and straightforward. Art in the traditional sense was typically an artifact, yet today artists often create pieces that require minimum or virtually no work. Not to mention "readymades," which are simultaneously art and reality, "To mistake an artwork for a real

[28] Danto 1964, p. 572
[29] Anonymous writer quoted in Ibid
[30] Ibid., p. 571
[31] Ibid., p. 573
[32] Ibid., p. 574

object is no great feat when an artwork is the real object one mistakes it for."[33] To exercise this point, Danto considers Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964) paired with a Brillo carton from the grocery store. Despite their visually indistinguishable appearance, we find that one is art while the later is not.[34] Danto reasons that the definition as to what is art must be philosophically based. Danto argues that in today's world, art requires a conceptual theory: "It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is […]. To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry- an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld."[35] Consequently, a theoretical background is what is responsible for art and the so-called artworld: "It is the role of artistic theories, these days as always, to make the artworld, and art, possible."[36] Danto essentially shifts the focus from the physical artwork itself, since the conceptual aspects are often more important than the technical aspects. He provides an example with a passage from Ch'ing Yuan:

> *Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. But now that I have got the very substance I am at rest. For it is just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters.*[37]

Danto's theory offers an explanation as to why a division exists between traditional and modern circumpolar art, the division is conceptually based. Juliussen's "natural readymades" fit into this paradigm, where unmodified reindeer bone became art because of the position it has in the artworld, an enveloping context which makes it a fine art object. It also helps to explain why people have had a negative reaction to Juliussen's non-conventional usage of the reindeer medium. One cannot fully appreciate her art without having knowledge and understanding of the philosophical dimensions.

The American theorist, George Dickie, later adopted Danto's Reality Theory which he refers to as "The Perceptually Indistinguishable Objects Argument."[38] Dickie credits Danto's argument as "a solid contribution to the philosophy of art." He believes that Danto's argument, in showing art's dependence on a background, has provided the basis for the revival of theorizing about art.[39] However in contrast to Danto, Dickie

[33] Danto 1964, p. 575
[34] Ibid., p. 580
[35] Ibid
[36] Ibid., p. 581
[37] Yuan quoted in Ibid., p. 579
[38] Dickie 1997, p. 20
[39] Dickie 1984, p. 25

provides a different understanding of what context is, namely an institutional one.[40] Dickie set out to formulate a cultural theory of art in 1969, inspired by Danto's article *The Artworld* (1964).[41] This approach became what is known as the institutional theory of art.[42] Needless to say, this version (1969) was not Dickie's final formulation of the theory. After several revisions on various occasions, in 1971 and 1974, Dickie's fourth version was published in 1984. The first three formulations can be recognized as the earlier varieties, while the fourth version seems to be Dickie's last formulation.[43] Over the years, Dickie and Danto have more or less disputed with each other through various publications. While reading the literature, one imagines these discussions turning into heated arguments.[44]

Many other theorists have written about the artworld, but I believe that Dickie's version is most fully articulated. According to Dickie, he took a more "anthropological" approach than Danto, by focusing on the cultural phenomena of the artworld. Whereas Danto's later theory was a mixture of psychological and cultural elements.[45] I believe that the cultural dimension of Dickie's theory is valid when considering Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art.

From the beginning, Dickie attempted to characterize what painters, writers and similar groups do when they create works of art.[46] The underlying concept behind the theory was to develop a method to describe why an artwork is regarded as art.[47] Not to be confused with a method enabling people to identify artworks. The goal was not to create a definition for art. Dickie states, "It seems perfectly reasonable to me that even if one had a completely adequate definition of 'art' that it would still be possible that one might not

[40] Dickie 2000, p. 97
[41] Dickie 1969, pp. 253-6
[42] Dickie 2001, p. 7
[43] Dickie 2000, p. 93
[44] Dickie writes, "Arthur Danto picked up Wollheim's version of what my earlier view is and incorporated it into a paper on which I was a commentator. I informed Danto that this was a gross misinterpretation of my earlier view, but when his paper was published, he still attributed this view to me. Subsequently, Danto attributed this same view to me in one of his columns in The Nation. I wrote a letter of protest to the editor which was published along with Danto's reply to my letter […]. Both Wollheim and Danto published their comments well after the appearance of the late version (Wollheim even refers to the late version). It is unfortunate that Wollheim did not take sufficient notice of the later version or that Danto did not take any notice of the later version because either would have provided a better basis for a more accurate interpretation of my earlier version." Dickie 2001, pp. 54-6
[45] Carney 1975, p. 200
[46] Dickie 1993, p. 74
[47] Dickie 1997, p. 24

be able to tell whether a given object is a work of art."[48] Dickie believes that objects become art because of the position they occupy within an institutional context.[49]

Although Dickie further develops Danto's theory, it is important to recognize that their concepts of the artworld are slightly different. Since the beginning, Dickie has viewed the artworld as a "background for the practice of creating and experiencing art - a background that is an essential part of the practice."[50] Dickie writes, "It turns out that the things that Danto has in mind as the artworld and what I understand the artworld to be are very different sorts of things."[51] Danto sees art as a sort of language, while the institutional theory does not.[52] More specifically, Danto maintains that artworks are about something, artworks "[…] are linguistic to the extent of admitting semantical assessment and in contrasting in the required essential way with reality."[53] Dickie outlines five definitions in his theory, which he considers to be the core notions.

1. An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art.
2. A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.
3. A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them.
4. The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems.
5. An artworld system is the framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public.[54]

The significant aspect of Dickie's theory is outlined in the second definition above.[55] According to Dickie, the artworld is a structure within artists creating art that is aimed at a public.[56] The roles of the artist and public are at the center of the artworld. As mentioned in Dickie's fourth definition, an artworld is a collection of different artworld systems. An artworld system represents different groups, not only artists, but also curators, art historians and viewers (the public).

[48] Dickie 2001, p. 43
[49] Dickie 2000, p. 93
[50] Dickie 2001, p. 19
[51] Dickie 1993, p. 73
[52] Dickie 1984, p. 27
[53] Danto 1981, p. 142
[54] Dickie 1984, pp. 80-2
[55] Ibid., p. 80
[56] Dickie 1993, p. 75

Misunderstanding and Elitist Tendencies

Dickie's theory has been met with widespread criticism, often stemming from misinterpretation by a number of critics, such as Arthur C. Danto, Richard Wollheim, Monroe Beardsley, Timothy Binkley, Ted Cohen, James Fletcher, Peter Kivy, Colin Lyas, Robert Schultz, Kendall Walton and Jeffrey Wieand.[57] Many of these theorists have criticized the institutional definition of art to be too restrictive to encompass the notion of art.[58] Dickie has also been criticized for placing too much focus on the context and background, from which we understand and appreciate works of art. In doing so, he says little about the artworks themselves.[59] I believe this is because art nowadays, pending on a conceptual background, can be practically anything. This raises a significant question, is admittance to the artworld based on the art itself or on the artist's title? In my investigation of Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art, I found that the art and the artist's title have a very intimate, almost interdependent, relationship.

Theorists have either viewed the artworld as democratic or elitist. It seems like misunderstandings, concerning Dickie's theory, have created the notion that the artworld has elitist tendencies. Stephen Davies claims that the theorists Arthur C. Danto, Terry Diffey and George Dickie "[…] do not see the function of art as essentially, or even primarily, political and so do not characterize the structure of the Artworld in political terms."[60] These theorists have characterized the artworld as democratic, wherein most artists are said to be members or are at least capable of joining if they choose to.[61] However, there seems to be an unsettlement, as Danto has drawn attention to elitist attributes. Danto writes, "And his [Dickie's] notion of the artworld was pretty much the body of experts who confer that status [of art] on something by fiat. In a way, Dickie's theory implies a kind of empowering elite."[62] In Richard Wollheim's book, *Painting as an Art* (1987) he also criticizes Dickie's earlier version of his theory:

> *Does the art-world really nominate representatives? If it does, when, where, and how, do these nominations take place? Do the representatives, if they exist, pass in review of all candidates for the status of art, and do they then, while conferring this status on some, deny it to others? What record is kept of these conferrals, and is the status itself subject to revision? If so, at what intervals, how, and by whom? And, last but not least, Is* [sic] *there really such a thing as the art-world, with the*

[57] Dickie 1984, p. 7
[58] Davies 1991, p. 81
[59] Neill and Ridley 1995, p. 213
[60] Davies 1991, p. 80
[61] Ibid
[62] Danto quoted in Dickie 1993, p. 74 (Dickie's brackets)

> *coherence of a social group, capable of having representatives, who are in turn capable of carrying out acts that society is bound to endorse?*[63]

Dickie believes that such accusations of elitism stem specifically from misunderstanding of his article from 1969, where he wrote, "[…] an artifact upon which some society or some subgroup of society has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation."[64] Stephen Davies interprets this part of Dickie's theory as artists creating art by an exercise of authority. Davies writes, "[…] something is a work of art as a result of its being dubbed, baptized, or honored as a work of by someone who is authorized thereby to make it an artwork by her position within the institution of the Artworld."[65] When Dickie speaks of "a group conferring the status of candidacy," he did not intend to mean that the whole artworld acts as a group to create works of art, but rather a group that makes movies or puts on a play.[66] Instead, he believes that the creation of art falls under the idea of artists being in a position to do something because of knowledge and skill, rather than authority.[67]

My understanding of the artworld is that "membership" is only partially tied to territory, since the artworld has core nations, like the U.S. and Europe. Artists are allowed to roam freely among the various cores, they may move from one geographically disadvantaged place to a better one. Artists' movement is in fact beneficial for the art cores, as they receive outside influences. The so-called peripheral areas influence the core areas conversely.[68] New York represents one of the core regions because it "[…] is the location of several of the most important physical institutions of art, collections, research institutes, showrooms and galleries, not to mention the great number of artists and other art world professionals who live and work there."[69] Senungetuk fits perfectly into this model. He moved from a periphery area to New York. In doing so, he infiltrated canonized art history. In returning to Alaska, he influenced the periphery as well.

In theory, one could argue that the artworld is democratic, but what about the artists who do not have the financial ability to travel within the artworld? Fortunately, Juliussen and Senungetuk have had the opportunity to travel and study abroad, but there are surely other artists who have not. This may be one example of an elitist tendency.

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[63] Wollheim 1987, p. 15
[64] Dickie 1969, p. 254
[65] Davies 1991, p. 78
[66] Dickie 1993, p. 74
[67] Dickie 1997, p. 22
[68] Bydler 2004, p. 197
[69] Ibid

Another fact is that artworks are often waitlisted before they are acknowledged as potential works for the Art Historical cannon. Similar to remarks made by Jimmie Durham, Gerardo Mosquera[70] writes,

> *The history of art has, to a large extent, been a Eurocentric story. It is a construction 'made in the West' that excludes, diminishes, decontextualizes and banishes to bantustans a good part of the aesthetic-symbolic production of the world. It is becoming increasingly urgent* […] *to deconstruct it in search of more decentralized, integrative, contextualized and multidisciplinary discourses, based on dialogue, hybridization and transformation, open to an intercultural understanding of the functions, meanings and aesthetics of that production and its processes.*[71]

In analyzing and interpreting Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art, there is a noticeable struggle concerning the cultural context of their art. Yet being Western artists, Juliussen and Senungetuk avoid this claim of exclusion. Perhaps the artworld is elitist. Yet if it were, Juliussen and Senungetuk would perhaps prefer titles such as global or international artist. The term "Indigenous artist" does not seem to accurately describe their current artistic activity (or the trends in art) in the circumpolar region. This could explain why they might have second thoughts about being referred to as such. Pertaining to the title of artist, I do not consider the institutional theory of art to be elitist. By not having a preference of title of artist, I believe they want the viewer to consider their art above everything before assigning a title such as Indigenous artist.

Cultural Aspects

Through my research of the institutional theory of art, I have acknowledged it as a Western concept. Despite this, Dickie discusses a number of cultural aspects of the theory, possibly bestowing it with a universal character. I believe that the cultural aspects of the theory are very important, in regard to Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art. Dickie situates art within human culture because he finds the traditional theories hopeless in defining characteristics.[72] He writes,

> *The general claim of the institutional theory is that if we stop looking for exhibited (easily-noticed) characteristics of artworks such as representationality, emotional expressivity, and the others that the traditional theorists focused on, and instead*

[70] Gerardo Mosquera was born in Havana, Cuba. Currently, he works at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York where he is an art critic, lecturer, curator and historian.
[71] Mosquera 1995, p. 121
[72] Dickie 2000, p. 103

> *look for characteristics that artworks have as a result of their relation to their cultural context then we can find defining properties.*[73]

In order to illustrate that art is a cultural phenomenon, Dickie uses gold as an example. He claims that there would be gold even if there were no cultures anywhere, because it is a physical entity. Yet there would not be the concept of art if there was not a cultural context, because the concept of art is not a tangible being.[74] In my opinion, the cultural aspects of this theory allow for openness and democratic acceptance of art created in all cultures. Dickie notes,

> *The central insight of the cultural approach is that art is a collective invention of human beings and not something that an artist produces simply out of his or her biological nature as a spider does a web or as a bower bird does a bower. The production of an artwork, unlike the production of a bower, does not appear to be directly connected to behavior closely tied to the evolutionary process as the bower of a bower bird clearly is because of its role in the reproductive process.*[75]

This theory has a kind of universal character, as it seems liberal in its "anything goes" attitude. Not to mention its break from the linearity of traditional theories. Instead of a linear descent, the institutional art theory is characterized by circularity, it seems to embrace untidiness.

According to Dickie, "No artwork, no matter how unusual, can escape its relations to its cultural context. The problem is to find the defining relational properties of artworks and their cultures and to characterize them correctly."[76] As we have seen, the bicultural aspect of Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art does in fact make it difficult to situate correctly. Yet consistent with Dickie's reasoning, the Indigenous aspects in their art must be taken into consideration. Even if their art is deemed as global, the local aspects must not be forgotten. This seems rational because it establishes a context within which the artworks can be understood. Obviously the more background information one has, increases the experience for the viewer, allowing them to interpret the artwork, from many different angles.

[73] Dickie 2001, p. 57
[74] Dickie 2000, p. 29
[75] Dickie 2001, p. 10
[76] Ibid., p. 57

Conclusion

Deciding on a title for this dissertation reflects the knowledge I have gained during my study. The first title I devised was *A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Contemporary Indigenous Artists.* Soon after, I realized that this title jumped to conclusions. In regard to contemporary art, this title seemed to bias the reader before they even started reading. The word Indigenous seems to have many obscure implications. After studying Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art, I was not convinced that titling them as Indigenous artists gave an accurate description of their art. As a viewer, one has preconceptions of both contemporary and traditional Indigenous art. One may assume that the art will appear outwardly "Native." Yet an Indigenous artist's heritage alone cannot predict a specific kind of art form. Subsequently, I formulated the title, *Contemporary Global Artists from the Circumpolar Region*. Once again, this title seemed to be insinuating something about the artists. At long last, I realized that I needed a more "neutral" title, providing the reader with the opportunity to form their own opinion as they develop insight on the artists' art and lives.

Through my research of Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art, I found a common trend in contemporary circumpolar Indigenous art. Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art represents a form of expression which does not conform to the categories usually assigned to it, as witnessed in much of contemporary circumpolar art. As the world is becoming more interconnected through the movements of people and cultural interchange, several artists are creating art with a modern form of expression. In Norway, we can say this movement was initiated by the Sámi artist Iver Jåks. While Senungetuk can be recognized as the "father of modernism" in Alaska Native art. Juliussen represents the second generation of artists, who further uphold this development by following in their footsteps. Even though Juliussen and Senungetuk have been pressured to create traditional art, they do not surrender. They refuse to be controlled or limited by others. Their art breaks boundaries with traditional Indigenous art, extending far beyond the local and national art scene, to a global art perspective.

Being bicultural or multicultural artists, they create works that are glocal, a melding of so-called local and global aspects. The fundamental conundrum is the bicultural nature of their art. They translate local themes into a contemporary form of expression. It is how they portray this melding that makes their artworks so fascinating.

Their art is exceptional at creating a kind of dialogue with the viewer. Through a combination of a number of different aspects, their art has a sort of mesmerizing quality.

Juliussen and Senungetuk seem proud of their Indigenous heritage. Yet both of them have made it clear to me that they are simply artists. They do not feel the need to be recognized as Indigenous artists. An Indigenous heritage is only one element of many different facets that make up their art. In remaining "neutral," concerning the title of artist, they hope that the viewer will consider their art first and foremost. Moreover, neutrality can also prevent restriction from certain culture banks. By not refusing the title of Indigenous artist, they are still allowed access to their minority cultures.

I found that the viewer's perception of the artwork and the artist's title were interconnected. The term Indigenous has different implications when referring to people and art. In general, Indigenous people are recognized as having moved into modern society, but the same cannot be said about the art, which perhaps still connotes traditional handicraft.

In this dissertation I have investigated the titles of Indigenous and global art. The artworld have been criticized for being elitist, perhaps because it is a theory that originated in the West. Yet this is not something that Juliussen and Senungetuk have experienced, perhaps, because they create art in the Western sense. I recognize the artworld as democratic. This could also explain why they do not exercise a preference concerning their title of artist. In an attempt to avoid a political discussion, I have chosen not to employ Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. Even though postcolonialism is a part of circumpolar history, the focus in this dissertation has been contemporary art. Said's method has been used in the past when discussing Indigenous art. I had to search for a new model, which was less postcolonial orientated. I discovered that the institutional theory of art would provide the necessary framework to situate Juliussen's and Senungetuk's art. Furthermore, the institutional theory of art can also be applied to justify that non-modified objects can be recognized as fine art. Something that is often seen in contemporary Indigenous art, for example in Juliussen's piece *Dust and Bones (Dopmu ja dávttit)*. I refer to these kinds of artworks as "natural readymades."

What the future holds for Indigenous art is conceivably impossible to guess. Perhaps the meaning of the term "Indigenous artist" will soon be obsolete, if it is not already. I believe that this label should be used with caution when referring to contemporary circumpolar art. That is, pending on its development into a more contemporary term, followed by new connotations. Until then, I believe that Juliussen's

and Senungetuk's art should be recognized as global or international. Yet we must not forget or omit the Indigenous aspects. According to Dickie, artworks are connected to a cultural context. The solution I arrive at is that global seems to be a reasonable term, as it accounts for both Indigenous and mainstream aspects of the art. It may be unlikely that one title of art will ever be capable of describing all contemporary circumpolar art, as it is a very diverse group of artists, whose art is continually transforming. Senungetuk once said in an interview with Susan W. Fair:

> *We won't know [what the relationship between classic and contemporary Native arts will be in the future]. It's a funny thing about art. Artists - there's no dictation. It's a dream, it's a development, that an artist does* […]. *I wouldn't forecast it because there is always a new way of thinking, and somebody puts it on a material and ten years from now, there will be something that you and I cannot even think about*.[1]

[1] Senungetuk quoted in Fair 1993, p. 25 (Brackets written by Fair)

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