

VISUAL ARTS

Repositioned gallery points to new North

Marion Scott Gallery/Kardosh Projects exhibits contemporary drawings by Itee Pootoogook

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN

VANCOUVER SUN

The Marion Scott Gallery is opening its new space on South Granville with an exhibition of drawings depicting contemporary scenes of everyday life in Nunavut.

On view starting Saturday, the exhibition features 36 graphite and coloured pencil works of Itee Pootoogook, who lives in Cape Dorset.

By opening with an exhibition that challenges traditional ideas of Inuit art, Marion Scott Gallery is rebranding itself in a number of ways. The gallery has been showcasing Inuit art in curated exhibitions since 1995 but will now be holding more of them on a regular basis. It's part of the gallery's repositioning of the work of artists of northern Canada from a retail setting into a contemporary art environment.

The rebranding includes a partial name change. Officially, it is now called Marion Scott Gallery/Kardosh Projects. Although the Marion Scott Gallery is known internationally as an Inuit art gallery, the woman after whom the gallery is named hasn't been associated with it since she died in 1989. Kardosh Projects has been added to acknowledge the names of Judy Kardosh and her son, Robert, who now own and operate the business.

Under the name Kardosh Projects, the gallery will initiate projects with Inuit and northern artists. Last fall, Robert Kardosh worked with the government of Nunavut to link artists Tony Anguhalluq and Jamasie Pitseolak with Montreal's Studio PM, which has a long relationship with Inuit artists in Cape Dorset who make prints.

They learned a new print-making technique called sugar lift. Their work will be part of an show this spring at MSG called *Sweet Innovations*.



Nunavungmiuk, by Nunavut's Itee Pootoogook, who lives in Cape Dorset.

"The art is changing and we're also promoting the change," said Kardosh, the gallery's curator.

"I think personally for this art form to stay alive and be vital, it has to change and it has to reflect new sensibilities because that whole society is dynamic and changing."

Judy Kardosh said that collectors can initially be hesitant when they see something new.

"The artists are becoming very, very contemporary. It's not what one expects to see when you look at

Northern art," she said.

"There's a lot of work to be done to be the voices of these artists. Some of the established collectors have to readjust their tastes somewhat. These artists need a lot of support."

A consideration in the move is the gallery's proximity to other galleries, especially the Douglas Reynolds Gallery. Now collectors will only have a short walk between Marion Scott Gallery, the only gallery on south Granville specializing in contemporary and historical Inuit art from northern

Canada, and Douglas Reynolds, the city's premiere gallery for Northwest Coast art.

In the inaugural exhibition curated by Robert Kardosh, the drawings by Pootoogook don't focus on the kind of traditional images most people have come to associate with the north, such as mythical characters, sea life and subsistence-style hunting. Pootoogook sees how the Inuit live today with their snowmobiles, television sets and sunglasses.

"Whether their subjects are shown at work or rest,



Untitled, coloured pencil on paper, by Itee Pootoogook.

Pootoogook's portraits feature a minimum of incident, giving the images a surprising stillness," Kardosh wrote about the exhibition.

"These are drawings that celebrate the mundane moments that make up the everyday."

Carving With An Axe shows a man sitting in front of a long green boat looking directly at the viewer. In his left hand, he's holding a cigarette. He's wearing clothes like any northerner: Boots, brown pants, a blue jacket, and a hat with ear flaps. He's also sporting sunglasses and a thin moustache and soul patch — none of which conjure up a typical Inuit image. But there he is taking a break from carving soapstone, one of the traditional materials used by Inuit artists.

The image is a powerfully graphic one with the diagonal green boat and the vertical figure in the centre.

Pootoogook has expanded the definition of Inuit art by focusing on an everyday image — that of an Inuit artist gathering material to make traditional sculpture — and making that the subject of the art.

The drawings include portraits of his friends and family doing banal things such as drinking Coke and watching APTN. One shows a man behind bars; another, a construction worker standing in front of an insulated wall.

Pootoogook's subtle and precise sense of colour infuses the work. The landscape *Late Evening* has a sky of red and mauve glowing above a yellowish sea. The drawing conveys a sense of direct observation of a landscape translated onto a two-dimensional surface.

In another of his landscapes, *Long After Midnight*, the bottom of the paper has been left untouched by the artist's hand: The black paper itself stands for the blackness of the northern night.

Itee Pootoogook will be at a public reception and grand reopening Friday from 7 to 9 p.m.

kevingriffin@vancouversun.com
blog: vancouversun.com/
cultureseen
twitter.com/cultureseen

At a glance

ITEE POOTOOGOOK

When: Saturday, to April 10

Where: Marion Scott Gallery/Kardosh Projects, 2423 Granville.

Information: marionscot-gallery.com



MORE PHOTOS AT
VANCOUVERSUN.COM
/GALLERIES