

VISUAL ART

Pushing boundaries of traditional prints

Sugar-lift etching opens new creative possibilities for Inuit artists

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN

VANCOUVER SUN

Inuit artists are pushing the boundaries of traditional Inuit prints in a new exhibition of expressive works that includes subject matter rarely if ever portrayed by artists from the north.

The exhibition is called *Sweet Innovation* after the technique used by the four artists to create the prints. Instead of using an etching tool to create the kind of fine, controlled line associated with most Inuit prints, the artists poured or “painted” with a viscous substance comprising several ingredients including India ink, liquid dish detergent and corn syrup directly onto the etching plate. In some cases, sugar is added to the mixture which gives the technique its name: sugar-lift etching. The technique allows artists to create looser and more gestural works.

The prints came about because of a unique collaboration. Marion Scott Gallery/Kardosh Projects (MSG/KP) co-sponsored — with the Nunavut government — a two-week residency for Tony Anguhaluq and Jamasie Pitseolak at Montreal’s Studio PM, the leading Inuit printmaker in the country. Kenojouak Ashevak and Jutai Toonoo, the other two artists, created prints in Cape Dorset with the support of West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative, Studio PM and Dorset Fine Arts.

Robert Kardosh, the gallery’s director-curator, said MSG/KP sponsored the residency to give Inuit artists an opportunity to create works that challenge what collectors and the public think of as Inuit art.

“Part of the point of the show is to say: Why can’t Inuit artists do that? Why do they have to work within the restrictions that constitute Inuit art?” Kardosh said.

“We’ve always promoted the idea that Inuit artists are artists — their ethnicity is secondary, even if they’re traditional artist doing traditional things. I’ve always seen them as artists with unique visions.

“We want to give opportunities to artists to do things that they can’t do in Cape Dorset, or wherever they live.”

The senior artist in the group is Ashevak, the pioneering Inuit artist who first used the sugar-lift technique in 2005. Now in her 80s, she’s probably best known for

her finely etched *The Enchanted Owl* with its exaggerated curving and elongated red and black feathers. A widely reproduced example of Inuit art, it was also used on a stamp by Canada Post.

Ashevak has three works in *Sweet Innovation* but one in particular called *Owl’s Overture* illustrates the much looser way the sugar-lift technique allows artists to work. Created in a collaboration with the painter Harold Klunder, the print includes a variation on Ashevak’s signature mythic owl but done in a rawer, more expressive way.

Pitseolak has used the flowing nature of the sugar-lift liquid to play with thickness and create images Kardosh said he’d never seen before in an Inuit print. They include abstract-like images of brushes in brown-black hues printed on round pieces of paper.

One of Pitseolak’s strongest works is of a mask-like image that started out as a goalie mask. The original piece has been modified and morphed into something sinister and ghoulish — almost shamanistic.

“This kind of work has a power that you don’t usually [see] in the prints that come out of the communities in their collections,” Kardosh said. “They’re not clean — that’s what I like about them. It’s an emotive sensibility. Some people will think they’re messy. I see them as very alive and modern.”

Both Pitseolak and Toonoo will attend the opening reception Saturday starting at 1 p.m. At 3 p.m., they’ll be taking part in a discussion at MSG with Norman Vorano from the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Vorano is in town for the opening of *Inuit Prints: Japanese Inspiration* on Sunday at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of B.C.

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At a glance

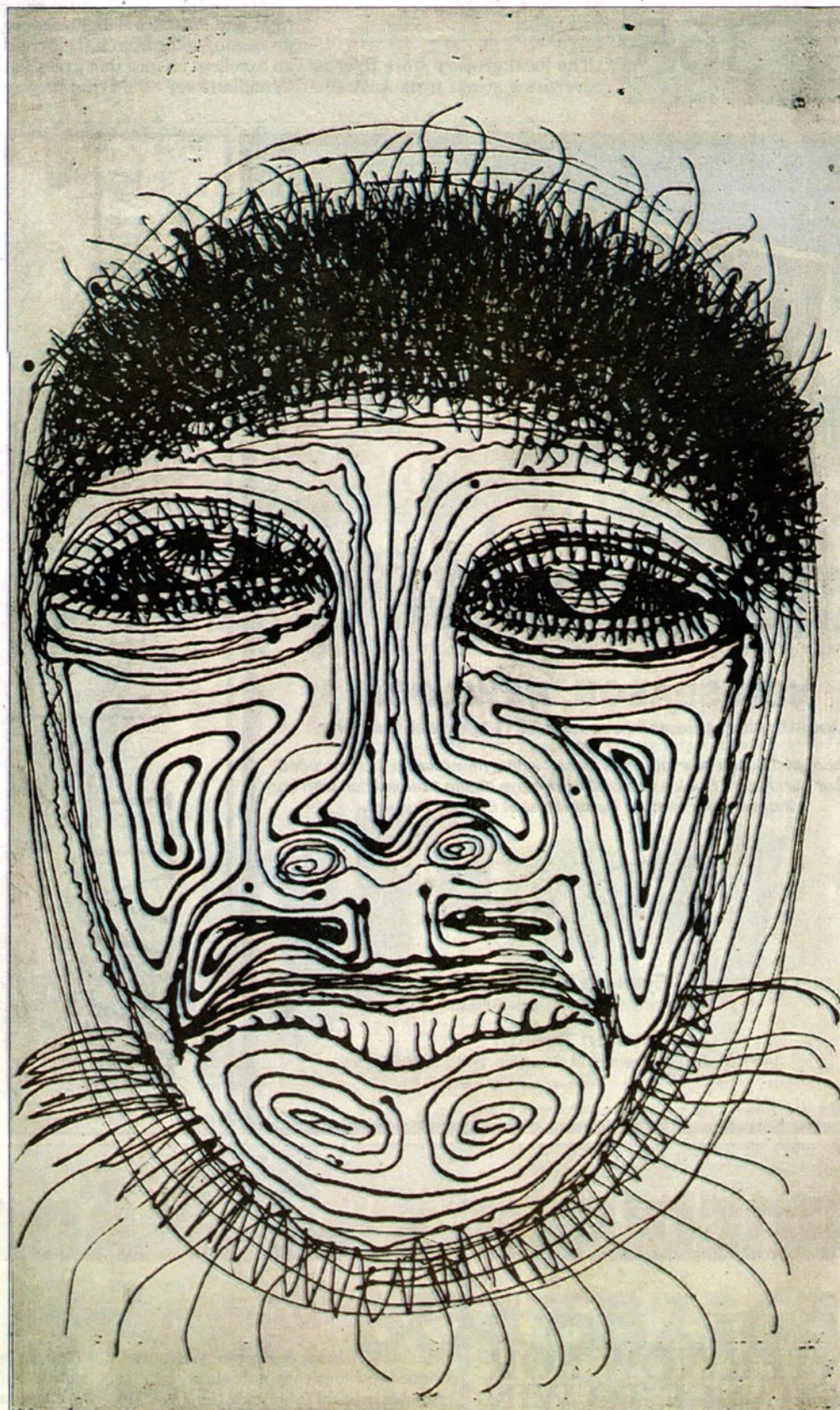
SWEET INNOVATION

Where: Marion Scott Gallery, 2423 Granville

When: Opening reception is Saturday from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. The exhibition continues to Saturday, July 30.



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Untitled (portrait #3), sugar-lift etching and aquatint, by Jutai Toonoo.