

# Young Inuit artist belies rumours of his genre's demise

**FINE ART** | Tony Anguhalluq's striking landscapes transcend day-to-day concerns

BY LLOYD DYKK  
VANCOUVER SUN

All 26 works in the show of Tony Anguhalluq, on view at the Marion Scott Gallery until April 29, sold out even before it opened.

One Nova Scotia collector wanted all of the pieces, priced at \$500 each, but several works had already been spoken for. This would seem to contradict curator Robert Kardosh's claim that people have been predicting the demise of Inuit art for a long time. Fortunately, as he puts it, "it's proven more resilient than anticipated."

But it is surprising for the 37-year-old Anguhalluq, considering his relative newness to art. He'd shown little interest in it before he was encouraged to join a two-year printmaking workshop in the small community of Baker Lake in 1995 (the art program was revived after being dispensed with in favour of a grocery store). He took to art right away, in keeping with, as Kardosh describes him, "the type of guy who'll try anything — he's courageous that way."

And hip. Following a vogue among the Inuit young, he dyed his hair orange ("which he thinks is blond," says Kardosh), and is apparently a whiz at moon-walking and hip-hop. Like many Inuit, he hunts and fishes for a living. He was adopted when young by two artists, both of them renowned and now dead: Luke Anguhadluq (Tony spells his name differently) and Marion Tuu'luq.

One work each (considerably more expensive and unsold) by the adoptive parents are part of the show and serve as sort of framing devices. Each is magical and inward, without any reference to the landscape.

Anguhalluq's work is extrovert and all about the landscape. While revealing a more practical frame of mind in his depiction of scenes of hunting and modern ways of life equipped with skidoos and rifles, his work is, however, still magical and transcends day to day concerns.

What will strike you as odd is the innocent play on perspective. Parts of a scene are captured from an aerial point of view while others in the same scene are either front-on or oblique. It's both disconcerting and charming to see a moored boat or a tent with its splayed-out guy wires from directly overhead while a caribou or a muskox regards the same scene with its feet on the ground. (This top view may be explained by the fact that Inuit artists don't draw on site. They draw at home looking down.)

When it comes right down to it, this show may make you wonder what is so "right" about western photographic perspective. It is, after all, only a trick, a technique, and a literal-minded one that tries to equal what the eye sees. But the inner eye is capable of seeing a great deal more than optical data.

With strikingly canny observation, Anguhalluq captures the very quiddity of an animal, the muskox, caribou or fish (the fish, oversize and just caught or else drying by the fire, have a look that is utterly piscine). Humans are reduced to cartoon-like figures with club feet and large hands which are almost invariably placed on the hips in a "so there" attitude which gallery owner Judy Kardosh describes as typical of Anguhalluq.

Remove the figures, which are swallowed up anyway by a sense of geographical vastness, and the works could almost serve as abstracts, and sophisticated abstracts, with beautiful colour balances. There is one stunner in particular that depicts a near cosmos of cold purple, which is the emotional colour of snow. And in the right light, snow does look purple and pink.

Mountains are jangles of angular lines that may remind you of a woodblock print by the Japanese.

The titles, printed at the bottom of each work, tend to be long and informative. Sometimes the information isn't borne out by what the images in coloured pencil contain.

For example, "Two Inuit are seal hunting for the weekend in July (2006)": There is only one Inuit in the picture. Or "Three Inuit are seal hunting and they got one seal": There is no seal in view, nor even one Inuit. "Four Inuit are camping for the summer holidays" amid many patches of bright blue. The blue

probably doesn't represent boulders, it may have more to do with blueberries, which are said to be extraordinary in that part of the world.

Sometimes a disparity is explained away in the title by the fact that one Inuit is inside the tent making tea.

It's still information.

And a lot of the activity seems to be happening while the Inuit are on vacation, though this begs the question of what an Inuit vacation is like, as opposed to work, i.e. survival.

These are less figures in a landscape than figures who are very much part of the landscape.

Kardosh describes Anguhalluq as "direct, childlike, receptive." Also unconventional. But, she adds, "the minute art becomes conventional, it becomes artistically dead."

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'Three Inuit are fishing and catching char and lake trout' [trout] (2006), by Tony Anguhalluq, a work in pencil crayon on paper that 'depicts a near cosmos of cold purple, which is the emotional colour of snow.'

Tony Anguhalluq

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