

# MEMORIES



**Abraham Anghik Ruben**







In the late summer of August 2009, my son Timothy and I visited my home settlement of **Paulatuk**, Northwest Territories, an Inuvialuit community since the early 1930s. **Paulatuk** translates to “place of soot”. Massive deposits of coal lay over the high hill along the coast that stretches east and west. The ancient Inuit used this coal for fuel as did the whalers. The missionaries arrived in 1938 to set up their mission. They probably found **Paulatuk** a favourable place to establish their mission because of these large coal deposits which they were able to use as fuel in the absence of wood, a scarcity in the northern regions.

My nephew John “Max” Kudluk, informed me that he had found a massive whale skull 30 miles up the coast due north of **Paulatuk**. He stumbled upon this enormous whalebone when he and his companion were shore-bound due to heavy eastern wind storms, common at that time of the year. John and his companion were stranded in this area for some-time. John decided to walk the coast, scouring the beaches and land for game and anything that could be deemed useful while they were stranded. During one of these walks he came across the whale skull. The skull had been pushed up onto a high gravel bar, most likely from ice ridges that developed along the coastline due to tides and currents. I examined the photographs of the skeletal remains and I believe this bowhead whale skull was from a whale that had died of natural causes and had been beached at this site. Over time and countless seasons, the natural climatic elements impacted dramatically on the skeletal remains. All that was left of the once massive whale was this skull that was pushed up to a high embankment on the beach. I agreed to acquire this large whalebone sight unseen.

In the spring of 2010, John “Max” Kudluk and his cousin Jason Ruben travelled up the coast by ski-doo and sled to the location of the skull and with great care they were able to bring back the whalebone intact. The photos that I received revealed just how massive a skull it was and confirmed my guess of it being a bowhead whale. On my trip to **Paulatuk** in August of 2010, I arranged for the shipping of the whalebone from **Paulatuk** to **Inuvik N.T.**, to **Vancouver** and then to **Salt Spring Island B.C.** When I first received news the whalebone had arrived, I quickly began working on an outline to develop ideas and to discover images that could be created from this massive piece of bone. It became clear to me from the photos that a sculpture telling the legends, life and beliefs of the Inuvialuit people would be the best use of this material.

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When I received the whalebone skull, I began by setting the piece in an upright position with its nose pointing downward. The top-side which I refer to as the front element would portray the world of the Inuvialuit, with the mother and child to one side and an Inuit whale hunter opposite them. At the center is a Shaman and the people for whom he is held responsible. The opposite side or underside of the whale bone would be carved to represent the spirit world of the Shaman and Sedna, the goddess of the sea.











The story begins with an image of a Shaman at the center (topside), standing with outstretched arms embracing a man and a woman above him. The Shaman's head is hollow as is his chest. This represents his shamanistic ability to travel between the spirit world and the physical world. His chest cavity is hollow showing the stylized ribcage. This represents the Shaman's death and rebirth – of becoming a more powerful and spiritually attuned force. The man and woman represent humankind.

The Raven figure seen at the left hand of the Shaman is a pivotal image in the creation mythology of the western arctic. It was the Raven who created the land, its lakes and rivers. Raven flora and fauna populate and colour the landscape. The Raven saw that a vital element was missing so he created a man to whom he taught the art of hunting and survival.

Over time, this man became adept at hunting and gained the skills he needed to survive in this harsh, though bountiful land. Raven noticed that man saw other animals paired with companions and saw that man was extremely lonely. One night as man slept Raven created a woman from the clay of the river bank where man rested. In the morning man awoke to find woman next to him. Raven spoke to them saying “Man, this is woman. She is to be your companion and your equal. Together you will make your home from what I have created.” The generations that resulted from this union are portrayed in the sculpture to the lower left and right of the Shaman.

















On the upper left side of this sculpture is the image of a mother and child. In the past, Inuit children were brought up with loving care. Children were thought to be deceased relatives reborn as children. The Inuit belief in reincarnation reinforced their reverence for children and the women who raised them. This belief coupled with the belief in the existence of the soul in all living things coloured all aspects of Inuit life.



On the shoulder of the mother is the figure of a young boy in a sitting position. This boy, who sits inside a small shelter that is represented by his mother's hair, is undergoing the first stage of becoming a Shaman's apprentice. This is accomplished by depriving the young boy of nourishment and human contact until he connects with the spirit world and is visited by his spirit helper. As soon as this happens,

he is then chosen to undergo years of strenuous training in order to become a man worthy of this status to be a mediator between man and the world of spirit.

Below the seated boy is an image of a boat full of figures representing migration, and below it are seals and fish coming out of an opening. They too are engaged in their annual migration.



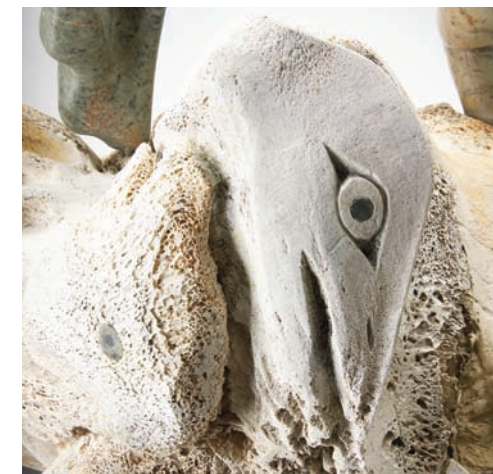




To the upper right is the Inuit hunter standing at the prow of his “umiak” (an open boat that can carry more than one person), ready to strike his toggle harpoon into a male beluga whale. The ancient Inuit hunted belugas, narwhals and larger bowhead whales from their “umiak” and or their kayak.

Behind the mother and child situated on the left side of the sculpture, facing it from the front, is the figure of a Shaman in a trance-like state as if taking flight. His hair is streaming back, his right arm is striking forward and his open mouth issues words of power. His right arm forms into a loon’s head with spirit helpers in front of him.

Above him are images of bears, walruses, seals, snowy owls, birds and animals who are chosen to be spirit helpers. On the right hand side of this sculpture is a young Inuit maiden who reflects the Sedna’s story of the Central and Eastern Arctic.













Sedna grew up with her mother and father. When she became of marrying age, her mother and father sought to find a suitable husband for her. She refused to accept anyone, until a handsome young man arrived in his kayak. This handsome young man was dressed in fancy furs. The young man did not leave his kayak. He is known as the Stormy Petrel. He is disguised as a man. He is man-like from the waist up and bird from below the waist. Sedna accepts his offer and he takes her back to his island. Here she discovered that she had been deceived by the Stormy Petrel: she became lonely and homesick. When a year passed and the sea was warm enough to travel, her father decided to visit her. Sedna was overjoyed to see her father and told him that she was unhappy. She convinced him to take her back with him. Her father took Sedna into his boat to take her back. When the Stormy Petrel saw what had happened he flew out to search for them, he stirred up the sea and created a storm. Sedna's father feared for his life and decided to throw Sedna overboard. She hung onto the side of the boat. Her father took out a knife and started cutting off her fingers. As her fingers fell into the sea each finger became a different sea creature. She fell into the sea and drowned. At the moment of her death, she becomes Sedna, goddess of the sea.

In the sculpture, Sedna has her right arm outstretched with the missing digits and below the fingers are sea creatures made of soapstone that wind their way around to the other side. The sea creatures that were created from her fingers, form her hair. Above her head, a soapstone Sedna rises like a phoenix reborn.





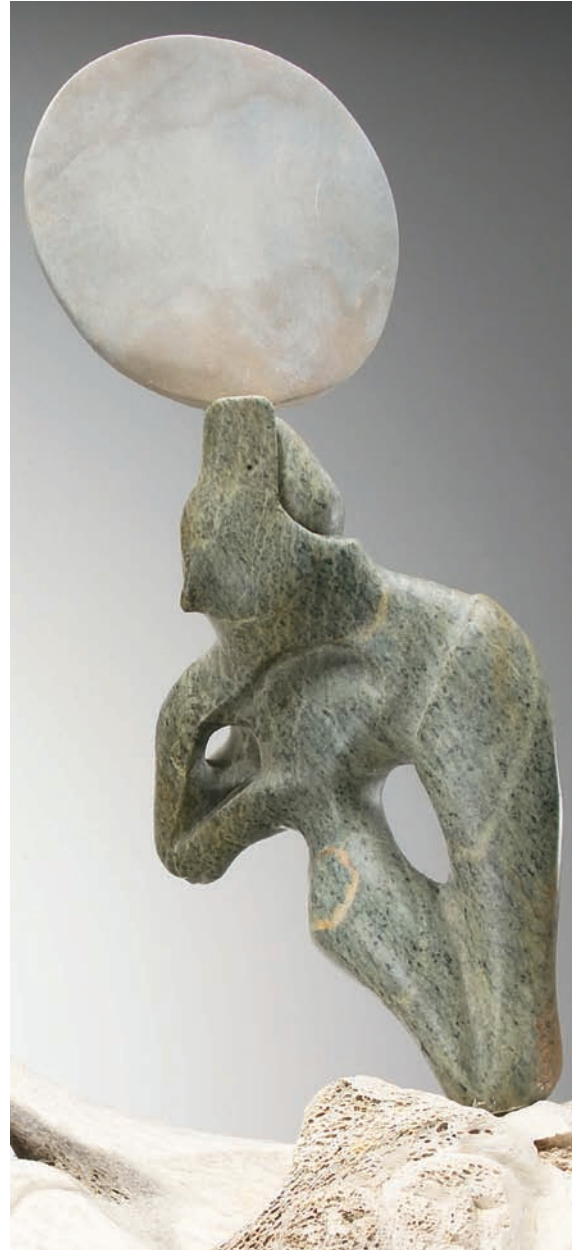




In the central part of the sculpture are images of a bear, caribou and wolverine, creatures of the land created by the Raven who is above them. The Raven was believed to be the god of the creatures of the land. That is why there are images of the Raven on both sides of the sculpture. Coming out from the front at the topmost rim of the sculpture are four Shaman drum dancers. The Shaman use the drum beat to enter into a trance-like state and become his spirit helpers. The lower drum dancer is a Raven with a masked figure above him; and either side of the masked figure are two spirit drum dancers. The gifted Shaman have the power to journey through their trances and dreams, visiting places that ordinary mortals can only experience in some afterlife.

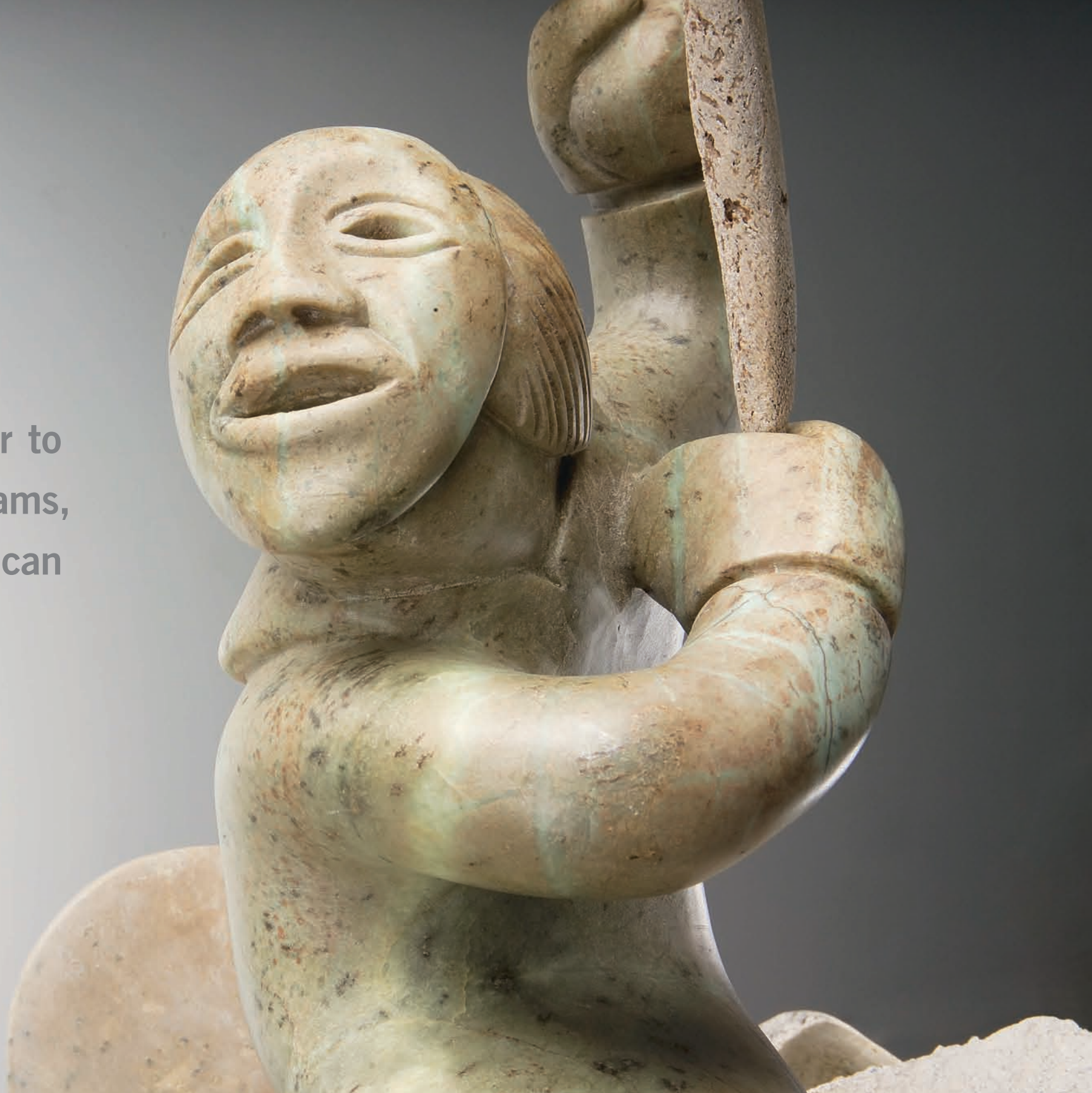








“The gifted Shaman have the power to journey through their trances and dreams, visiting places that ordinary mortals can only experience in some afterlife.”





# Abraham Anghik Ruben



Abraham Anghik Ruben unpacking his sculpture.

## Solo Exhibitions

- 2010** Abraham Anghik Ruben: Shaman's Dreams, Art Gallery of Mississauga
- 2009** Abraham Anghik Rubin, Kipling Gallery
- 2008** Abraham Anghik Ruben: Myths, Stories, Legends, Illustrated catalogue, Kipling Gallery, Woodbridge, ON
- 2003** The Art of Abraham Anghik Ruben, Appleton Galleries, Vancouver, BC
- 2001-02** Abraham Anghik Ruben, Illustrated catalogue, The Winnipeg Art Gallery
- 2002** Paiges Art Gallery, Ketchum, Idaho
- 2001** Paiges Art Gallery, Ketchum, Idaho
- 2000** Paiges Art Gallery, Ketchum, Idaho
- 1998** Maslak – McLeod, Santa Fe
- 1994** Abraham Anghik: Works in Bronze, The Isaacs/Innuity Gallery, Toronto
- 1991** "Spirit of My People:" Sculptures by Abraham Anghik, The Alaska Shop, New York
- 1981** Images for a Canadian Heritage, Vancouver, BC
- 1980** Abraham Anghik – New Sculptures, The Pollock Gallery, Toronto
- 1980** Bayard Gallery, New York
- 1979** The Pollock Gallery, Toronto
- 1978** The Pollock Gallery, Toronto
- 1977** The Pollock Gallery, Toronto

## Two-Person Exhibitions

- 1989** Out of Tradition: Abraham Anghik/David Ruben Piqtoukun, Illustrated catalogue, The Winnipeg Art Gallery

## Group Exhibitions

- 2010** The Winnipeg Art Gallery
- 2010** Canada's Northern House, Winter Olympics 2010, Vancouver, BC
- 2007** National Gallery, Touring Exhibition, Inuit Sculpture Now
- 2007** ItuKiagattal! Inuit Sculpture from the Collection of the TD Bank Financial Group, Guest Exhibitor, Victoria Art Gallery
- 2005** Iceland 1000 AD, Mayberry Gallery, Winnipeg
- 2004** Noah's Ark, National Gallery, Shawinigan, Québec
- 1997** Sun Valley Centre for Arts and Humanities, Ketchum, Idaho
- 1995** Canadian Inuit Sculpture: The Next Generation, Orca Aart Gallery, Chicago
- 1993** Arts from the Arctic, organized by the Canadian National Committee, Arts from the Arctic and Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Yellowknife
- 1993** Arts from the Arctic, Anchorage Museum, Anchorage, Alaska, Yakutsk Art Centre, Yakutsk, Republic of Sakha, Siberia
- 1987** Orcas Gallery, Salt Spring Island



**1984** Images Art Gallery, Toronto  
**1984-88** *Arctic Vision: Art of the Canadian Inuit*, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa. Tour of United States and Canada  
**1983-85** *Contemporary Indian and Inuit Art of Canada*, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa  
**1982** *New Work by a New Generation*, Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina, Regina  
**1982** *Recent Works by Anghik, Morriseau, Odjig, Thomas*, Gallery Quan, Toronto  
**1982** *Works by Abraham Anghik, David Piqtoukun, Stefanie Ham*, Gallery Quan, Toronto  
**1981** *The Inuit Sea Goddess*, Surrey Art Gallery, Surrey  
**1981** Gallery Quan, Toronto  
**1980** National Museum of Man, Ottawa  
**1980** Children of the Raven Gallery, Vancouver  
**1979** Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto  
**1978** *The Coming and Going of the Shaman*, The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg  
**1977** Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto  
**1975** University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska

Public Collections

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto  
Canadian Embassy, Washington DC  
Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa  
De Young Museum - Fowler Collection - San Francisco  
Glenbow Museum, Calgary

House of Commons, Ottawa  
Indian and Northern Affairs, Canada, Ottawa  
McMaster University Art Gallery, Hamilton  
McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg  
Museum of Inuit Art, Toronto  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa  
Norwegian Folk Museum, Oslo, Norway  
Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Yellowknife  
Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto  
The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg  
University of Alaska, Board of Regents, Juneau, Alaska

Corporate Collections

The Richardson Group, Winnipeg  
Kingswood Capital, Vancouver  
Alberta Stock Exchange, Calgary  
Terasen Gas Building, Vancouver  
Glaxo/Smith/Kline, Mississauga  
Alcan World Headquarters, Montreal  
BC Chartered Accountants Building, Vancouver  
Imperial Oil Ltd., Alberta  
Labbatt’s Ltd., Ontario  
Citicorp, Toronto  
BMW Canada, Ontario  
PowerOne Capital Markets Ltd., Toronto  
Pinetree Capital Ltd., Toronto  
Sprott Asset Management, Toronto

Private Collections

Gary and Carol Leach, Salt Spring Island  
Trish and Larry Kubal, San Francisco  
Anthony von Mandel, Vancouver  
Lorne Balshine, Vancouver  
Mrs. Selznik, Ketchum, Idaho  
Don Klune, Ketchum, Idaho  
Joseph Segal, Vancouver  
Sheldon Inwentash & Lynn Factor, Toronto  
Pat DiCapo, Toronto  
Eric Sprott, Toronto  
Arthur Block, Vancouver  
Leon Kahn, Vancouver  
Martin Goldfarb, Toronto  
Klamer Family, Toronto  
John Adams, Vancouver  
Dr. J. Hyman, New York  
Martha Marston, Dallas  
Tommy Chong, Paris, France  
Alex de Figueiredo, Vancouver  
Christian Steckler  
Sam and Esther Sarick  
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Panetta Family, Vaughan, Ontario  
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Albert Bozzo, Woodbridge, Ontario  
Ruffolo Family, Nobleton, Ontario  
Nick Tsimids, Richmond, Hill, Ontario  
Dr. and Mrs. Greenspan, Thornhill, Ontario  
Mark Di Poce, Kleinburg, Ontario  
Bruno and Paula Zaina, Woodbridge, Ontario  
Mr. and Mrs. Louis Rodriguez, Woodbridge, Ontario  
Heather M. Beecroft

Publications

June 2008 “*From the Spirit*”, Documentary, Bravo AE

Honours and Achievements

Expo 86, Banner and backdrop for NWT Pavillion performance stage, Vancouver, Canada 1986

National competition for Glaxo/Smith/Kline Canadian Headquarters - 16’ limestone sculpture, *Northern Myth Northern Legend* 1990

Instructor for Inuit Artists’ College sculpture workshop in Ottawa, 1991

Manulife National Sculpture Competition for Placement at BC Gas Building, Vancouver, Canada 1993

Chair, Canadian National Committee for the Organization of the Circumpolar Exhibition, *Arts from the Arctic*

Holocaust Sculpture Memorial, Holocaust Museum, Jerusalem, Israel, 1992 – ongoing

National competition for University of Manitoba’s Aboriginal Student Centre, 7 1/2’ bronze sculpture.





## KIPLING GALLERY

KIPLING GALLERY • 7938 Kipling Avenue, Woodbridge, ON L4L 1Z5  
Tel. 905.265.2160 Fax. 905.265.8957 [www.kiplinggallery.com](http://www.kiplinggallery.com)

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