

ANDREW QAPPIK (SELF PORTRAIT IN A PRINTSHOP)

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(see images after text)

Andrew Qappik, an Inuit graphic artist currently residing in Pangnirtung, Nunavut, was born on February 25th, 1964, in Nunataq. Interested in art from a very early age he started copying comic book characters and sketching classmates and teachers when he was eight years old. Strongly influenced by his uncles, Solomon Karpik (1947 – 1989) and Imoona Karpik (b. 1950) who were printmakers, he was encouraged to copy their drawings.¹ In 1978, at the age of fourteen, he had five prints in the Pangnirtung collection. Since then, he has been a regular contributor to the collection and the recipient of a number of important commissions. Most significantly, Qappik designed the polar bear logo used by the Government of Nunavut and advised the Chief Herald of Canada on Nunavut's coat-of-arms and flag. He also designed the logo for Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated. H.G. Jones, Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, began to be interested in Qappik when he was still a boy and copying his uncles' drawings. Jones collected all of Qappik's works, and later donated them to the Winnipeg Art Gallery, to ensure the collection stayed in Canada.

Qappik's involvement with the Pangnirtung Cooperative's print shop began in the mid-1970s. He began cleaning the shop as a part of a work experience program, but his involvement soon moved to a creative level.² In 1988 the print shop was forced to close, but the artists and printmakers refused to accept the end of their art-making.³ Later the same year the Uqqurmiut Inuit Artist Association was incorporated as a fully Inuit-owned and Inuit-run organization. The

artists started raising funds to build a new arts centre. The Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts and Crafts became a reality over the winter of 1990-91.⁴

Having introduced Andrew Qappik, I will now focus this paper on an analysis of *Self-Portrait in Printshop* (2003). The most significant visual elements of this print is design. The shapes in this print are geometric and linear. Rectangles are the prevailing pattern in the composition, forming the floor of the studio, the windows, the prints on the wall, and the actual outline of the print shop. The circle of the printing machine is echoed in the logo on the artist's T-shirt and the movement of his arms. The space portrayed here is three-dimensional, with the artist working on the printing machine in the foreground, the wall of the printshop with four of Qappik's works in the middleground, and the landscape seen from the window of the shop in the background. This image is unusual of his practice in two ways. Firstly, it is a black-and-white image which is not typical for his works, in that his prints are usually quite colourful. Secondly, this is the only self-portrait of the artist. This being said, this image can also be seen as more than a self-portrait. As I will explain in my discussion below, this self portrait is also a portrait of the Inuit to-day. I will argue that through the inclusion of Qappik's other prints represented on the walls of the printshop that portray traditional Inuit subjects like the land and its animals, the artist in this self-portrait actively preserves the Inuit heritage and culture.

Andrew Qappik has a special affinity with the traditional Inuit way of subsistence—following wildlife and surviving on what nature provides. His prints capture images of the “old ways,” what he learned about past Inuit life from his elders. By addressing these issues in his work, he preserves the traditional Inuit way of life, the respect for the land, its animals, and for family and

ancestors. He links traditional and contemporary elements in bold and appealing images and fuses traditional themes with contemporary concerns.⁵

The theme common to most of his prints is the depiction of the artist's experiences on the land. Landscape in the background is a common element in many of his prints. The landscape is visible in his *Self-portrait in Printshop* from the window of the print shop where he is working. This depiction of landscape is not common in the older generations of artists. Marion Jackson recognizes two generations of Inuit printmakers.⁶ The first generation of artists were born on the land, and their worldview is based on the traditional way of life on the land. Their prints are characterized by the isolation of images in a void, the repetition of motif, and the use of multiple perspectives. The second generation of artists combine memories of land with the realities of life in a permanent settlement in which southern influences predominate. The third generation of artists, not considered by Jackson, is introduced by Annalisa R. Seagrave. These artists blend the Western techniques with a unique Inuit vision. The stylistic traits of the second generation may be applied, but each artist has their own individual style. Andrew Qappik is an example of a third-generation artist. The southern influence is visible in his works for example in the influence of comic books on his interpretation of animal forms and the fact that in his self portrait, he is dressed in contemporary Western clothing. At the same time, he uses multiple perspectives in many of his prints, some of which we can see on the walls of the print shop and in this self-portrait, thus echoing the art of the first generation of artists. Darlene Wight, curator of Inuit art at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, noted that Qappik often plays with perspective, using a bird's eye view looking down, and focuses on details like the splashing water left by the wake of a boat: "He uses very western techniques of drawing, like three-point perspective, shading to give three-

dimensionality to his works. When people think of Inuit works, prints, they think of flat images on the white paper. He puts his images into full landscapes, which is not typical.”⁷ Furthermore, in his focus on animals he refers to the traditional ways of life of the Inuit. Artists like Qappik help to ensure that the essential values of Inuit culture are maintained, even though rapid change has ruptured Inuit ways of life.

In these prints, Qappik pays tribute to the animals on which his people have depended for food, and continue to depend for sustenance and cultural survival.⁸ These images illustrate the intimate connections between people and animals. *Under My Wings* (2001) can be seen in the *Self Portrait in Printshop* at the top left of the image. It is a picture of a bird that looks like an owl, with its baby. The baby is looking up at her mother, and the mother returns the loving gaze. Qappik uses very soft colours in this print, mostly very light shades of pink, green, brown and blue. The print reflects his knowledge of one of the most well-known early Inuit printmakers, Kenojuak Ashevak (b. 1927), whose imaginative drawings, prints and carvings of animals reflect her experiences and life in the North. While her imagery is varied, she is best known for her birds, such as *Guardian Owl* (1980). This print, an example of the style of the first generation of artists is reflected in two main ways in *Under My Wings*: in the background without a landscape and intimate portrayal of animals. Similarly, Qappik’s deep respect for animal life is reflected in his touching scenes of polar bears with their cubs. His *Sleeping Bear* (2002) depicts a sleeping polar bear in an Inuit landscape of ice and snow. A very similar print is featured on the wall of *Self-portrait in Printshop*. Another recurring subject in his prints is family. This is illustrated in his 2002 print *Warmth and Sounds of Summer*. This is an image of two women and their babies, interacting with each other in a landscape of soaring birds. Qappik echoes the traditional Inuit art

here in the absence of the landscape in the background of the scene. This print can also be seen in *Self Portrait in Printshop*, on the wall of his studio. The importance of family is also portrayed in *Mother and Son* (2002). The drawing was made by Samantha Qappik, Andrew's daughter, and Andrew turned it into a print. It shows a mother with her baby, sleeping in the hood of her parka. The black hair of the woman is highly stylized into two braids at each side of her face. Her facial features are very expressive, with dotted lines around her nose, under her mouth and on her forehead. The baby's little head seems to be connected to the woman's head, suggesting a very intimate bond. The touches of soft pink and blue colours create a rainbow-like vibrancy.

The portrait of a people and communal living is constructed out of images, stories and legends. John Berger states that: "What distinguishes the life of a village is that it is also a living portrait of itself...constructed...out of opinions, stories, eye-witness reports, legends, comments and hearsay...Without such a portrait...the village would have been forced to doubt its own existence."⁹ In his writing about village peasants, Berger explains that "My writing about peasants separates me from them and brings me close to them."¹⁰ Unlike Berger, Qappik is not separate from his community. At the same time his prints reaffirm his participation in the "Inuit experience," bringing him closer to it—by creating these personal artistic responses to Inuit life.



Andrew Qappik (Self Portrait in a Printshop). 2003

Andrew Qappik (1964-)

Drypoint print, 35 x 40.5 cm.

Library and Archives Canada, archival reference number R11347-1

http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec_nbr=623540.



Under my Wings. 2001

Andrew Qappik (1964-)

Stencil, 48 x 38 cm

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http://www.uqqurmiut.com/2001_prints_pages/2001print30.html.



Guardian Owl, 1980

Kenojuak Ashevak

Lithograph, 55. 9 x 78. 7 cm

Galerie Elca London, Art Inuit

<http://www.elcalondon.com/dynamic/artwork_display.asp?ArtworkID=302>.



Sleeping Bear. 2002

Andrew Qappik (1964-)

Stencil, 54 x 70 cm

Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts and Crafts

<http://www.uqqurmiut.com/2002_prints_pages/2002print28.html>.



Warmth and Sounds of Summer. 2002

Andrew Qappik (1964-)

Stencil, 52 x 67 cm

Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts and Crafts

<http://www.uqqurmiut.com/2002_prints_pages/2002print29.html>.



Mother and Son. 2002

Samantha Qappik

Print by Andrew Qappik (1964-)

Stencil, 34 x 41.5 cm

Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts and Crafts

<http://www.uqqurmiut.com/2002_prints_pages/2002print31.html>.

NOTES

1 Andrew Qappik changed his name from Karpik to conform with modern orthography: Darlene Coward Wight, "Andrew Qappik: Memory and Reality," Pangnirtung Memories (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2010) 11.

2 Darlene Coward Wight. "Andrew Qappik: Memory and Reality," Pangnirtung Memories (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2010) 11.

3 Wight, 13.

4 Wight, 13.

5 Jane Sproull Thomson and Luke Ratzlaff, "Andrew Qappik's Contemporary Arctic Visions," Inuit Art Quarterly 20:4 (Winter 2005): 10.

6 Annalisa R. Seagrave, "Regenerations: The Graphic Art of Three Young Artists," Inuit Art Quarterly 13:4 (Winter 1998): 4.

7 Jane George, "Meet Andrew Qappik, the artist's artist," Nunatsiaq Online (2 May 2010)

<http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/8978_meet_andrew_qappik_the_artists_artist/>.

8 H.G. Jones, "Andrew Qappik: A Collector's Perspective," Pangnirtung Memories (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2010) 8.

9 John Berger, Pig Earth 9; Bruce Robbins, "Feeling Global: Experience and John Berger," *Boundary 2* 11:1/2 (Autumn 1982-Winter 1983): 299.

10 John Berger, Pig Earth 6-7; Bruce Robbins, "Feeling Global: Experience and John Berger," *Boundary 2* 11:1/2 (Autumn 1982-Winter 1983): 299.

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I can make art...Like Andrew Qappik. Dir. Jane Churchill. National Film Board of Canada (2005) <http://www.nfb.ca/film/i_can_make_art_like_andrew_qappik>.

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Seagrave, Annalisa R. "Regenerations: The Graphic Art of Three Young Artists." *Inuit Art Quarterly* 13:4 (Winter 1998): 4-15.

Thomson, Jane Sproull, and Luke Ratzlaff. "Andrew Qappik's Contemporary Arctic Vision." *Inuit Art Quarterly* 20:4 (Winter 2005): 10-16.

Uqqurmiut Centre for Arts and Crafts. The Uqqurmiut Inuit Artists Association. 30 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.uqqurmiut.com/index.html>>.