



CHANNEL 51: IGLOOLIK



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1 June — 30 August 2019

Curated by asinnajaq

Our name Isuma means ‘to think,’ as in Thinking Productions. Young and old work together to keep our ancestors’ knowledge alive. We create traditional artifacts, digital multimedia, and desperately needed jobs in the same activity. Our productions give an artist’s view for all to see where we came from: what Inuit were able to do then and what we are able to do now.

Zacharias Kunuk

Isuma Igloolik Productions occupies an essential part of contemporary Inuit culture. For over 30 years Isuma has produced a rich body of work comprised of fictional, documentary, and experimental films. These are the product of a filmmaking practice rooted in Inuit values of consensus, working together, service to the community, and cultural authenticity.

CHANNEL 51: IGLOOLIK, a project of Isuma in partnership with Vtape, Toronto, is the first large-scale tour of Igloolik Inuit video art from the Isuma and Arnait Women’s Video Collective. It celebrates a young cinematic tradition that has its own distinct voice and worldview, its own language, culture and traditions, history and stories, philosophy of education and knowledge-sharing, relationship to land, conception of gender and social structures, relationship to space and time, and vision for the future. This collection highlights the unique power of Inuit filmmaking: an approach that challenges individualistic notions of the “artist,” and centers itself in an ethical obligation to serve Inuit first through thoughtful self-representation.

The selection of films shown here at Esker Foundation, curated for this space and context by asinnajaq, is comprised of three feature-length films, which will each run for a month of the exhibition, and a 13-part dramatic television series, which will run in its entirety every day.

Inuit Piqutingit (What Belongs to Inuit) (2009), screened in June, depicts a group of Nunavut elders who travel to five museums in North America to see and identify artifacts, tools, and clothing collected from their Inuit ancestors.

Throughout July we will screen *Ajainaa! (Almost!)* (2001), which features Igloolik Elders discussing their views of contemporary Inuit life, including topics such as the role of Inuit and “Southern” forms of education, the relationship between parents and children, the passing along of knowledges, the effects of colonization and the adoption of Christianity, survival strategies (such as how to save a drowning victim), and the differences between camp and settlement life. Finally, through the month of August, we will feature the Inuktitut-language film *Unikkaat sivunittinnit (Messages from the Past)* (2012); shot in 1991, this film depicts Igloolik Elders telling stories about their family’s traditional *ajaja* songs—many of which have been sung and passed down orally for hundreds or thousands of years—before recording them in an Igloolik studio.

Running throughout the exhibition is the television series, *Nunavut (Our Land)*, which follows the lives of five fictional Inuit families living on the land in the mid-1940s. Based on true stories of present-day Elders, who still remember their early days growing up before government and settlement life begun, *Nunavut (Our Land)* takes us through the different seasons of the Arctic year and brings to life the people, setting, traditions, and continuing story of Inuit in the Igloolik region.

The other films from *CHANNEL 51: IGLOOLIK*, as well as Isuma and the Arnait Women’s Video Collective film library can be accessed and previewed for free online at www.isuma.tv. Contact Vtape.org for further information.

A project of Isuma in partnership with Vtape.



FILM SCHEDULE

JUNE

Inuit Piqutingit (What Belongs to Inuit) 2009

00:49:24

Inuktitut with English subtitles

This film follows a group of Nunavut elders who travel to five museums in North America to see and identify artifacts, tools, and clothing collected from their Inuit ancestors.

JULY

Ajainaa! (Almost!) 2001

00:51:23

Inuktitut with English subtitles

Igloolik Elders discuss their views of contemporary Inuit life, including topics such as the role of Inuit and “Southern” forms of education, the relationship between parents and children, the passing along of knowledges, the effects of colonization and the adoption of Christianity, survival strategies (such as how to save a drowning victim), and the differences between camp and settlement life.

AUGUST

Unikkaat Sivunittinnit (Messages from the past) 2012

00:51:26

Inuktitut

Shot in 1991, this film depicts Igloolik Elders telling stories about their family’s traditional *ajaja* songs—many of which have been sung and passed down orally for hundreds or thousands of years—before recording them in an Igloolik studio.

1 JUNE—30 AUGUST

***Nunavut (Our Land)* 1995**

13-part dramatic television series
Inuktitut with English subtitles

Nunavut (Our Land) follows five fictional families through the different seasons of an Arctic year, from the glorious northern spring to a uniquely Inuit Christmas Day. Other programs include contemporary documentaries on whale and polar bear hunting, modern leadership, elders' advice, and a youth group's effort to learn circus skills to reduce youth suicide.

Each episode is approximately 30 minutes long; the entirety of the series runs through one gallery day.

EPISODE SCHEDULE AND SYNOPSES

Note: Following the end of the 13th episode, the series will start over with Episode 1.

11:00 AM - Episode 1: *Qimuksik (Dog Team)*

Igloolik, Spring 1945. In *Qimuksik (Dog Team)* while imparting knowledge to the next generation, one family travels in the immense and beautiful Arctic during spring. Inuaq teaches his young son how to survive in the old way: driving the dogs, building the igloo, catching seals on the open water, and running down caribou to feed the family.

11:30 AM - Episode 2: *Avaja*

Igloolik, Spring 1945. Inuaq's family finally arrives at Avaja to a warm welcome. Yet, many changes have taken place. On the hill above the tents, they now find a wooden church and a priest. Sharing the fresh caribou feast, telling stories, Inuit are interrupted by the bell ringing. Inside the church the sermon is clear: Paul 4:22, 'Turn away from your old way of life.'

12:00 PM - Episode 3: *Qarmaq (Stone House)*

Igloolik, Fall 1945. Grandmother remembers the old way. In autumn 1945, five families build a stone house to prepare for the coming winter.

12:30 PM - Episode 4: *Tugaliaq (Ice Blocks)*

Igloolik, Fall 1945. Even here, news of the terrible world war raging outside makes people frightened and uneasy. They talk of the danger of the unknown future, of shamanistic intervention to protect their culture. With the north wind blowing, Inuaraq builds his sod house, while Qulitalik cuts the ice blocks for the porch.

1:00 PM - Episode 5: *Angiraaq (Home)*

Igloolik, Fall 1945. Akkitiq wakes up to a nice day for seal hunting. The stone house is warm and comfortable. Men pack up the dog team and look for seals on the fresh ice, while women work at home. Sometimes, the squabbling of children leads to trouble among families.

1:30 PM - Episode 6: *Auriaaq (Stalking)*

Igloolik, Spring 1946. It is the season of never-ending days. Two dog teams searching the spring ice, men and boys hunting day and night. Seals are everywhere: at the breathing holes, sleeping under the warm sun. Amachlainuk has a lucky day.

2:00 PM - Episode 7: *Qulangisi (Seal Pups)*

Igloolik, Spring 1946. Seal pups: springtime delicacy, prized for their soft fur and tender meat. When the pups start coming out on the ice, even small children and grandmothers can hunt. Packed up to travel, the families move slowly over the wet ice, through lakes of fresh melting snow, hunting on the way. Finding the breathing holes is a joyful game for everyone.

2:30 PM - Episode 8: *Avamuktulik (Fish Swimming Back and Forth)*

Igloolik, Spring 1946. Inuaraq throws his bones at the river and finds the fish swimming back and forth. Back at the tent Qulitalik sends the young men out with fish spears to try their luck. The walk up the rushing river is exciting but treacherous. Fish are hiding. It's easy to fall in.

3:00 PM - Episode 9: *Aiviaaq (Walrus Hunt)*

Igloolik, Summer 1946. The distant sound of the *atookatookatook*, the first gas engine to arrive in Igloolik, brings a surprise visitor to Qaisut,

island of the walrus hunters. The Priest arrives to study Inuit life, to dig in the ancient ruins, and to see the hunt. When it's time to go hunting, Inuaraq thinks the priest will bring bad luck but Qulitalik finally gives in. Out in the open water, cutting up walrus on an ice floe, Inuaraq's prediction almost comes true.

3:30 PM - Episode 10: *Qaisut*

Igloolik, Summer 1946. After the walrus hunt everyone is happy. There will be lots to eat for a long time. Children climb the famous cliffs of Qaisut, exploring paths and ruins left by hunters from the ancient times. Good walrus hunting doesn't only attract Inuit. Suddenly, Grandmother sees a polar bear after the meat. Quickly, men and dogs rush to protect the camp.

4:00 PM - Episode 11: *Tuktuliaq (Caribou Hunt)*

Igloolik, Fall 1946. Inuaraq and Qulitalik take their families over to Qiqiqtaaluk, the Big Island (Baffin Island), for the caribou hunt. It's an early autumn and the weather is already getting colder. Lakes are frozen and sea ice will thicken any day now. Abundant caribou feed Inuit families all winter.

4:30 PM - Episode 12: *Unaaq (Harpoon)*

Igloolik, Fall-Winter 1946. Sitting around the stone house carving a harpoon, Qulitalik starts talking about the year gone past. Everyone joins in with stories and laughter. Tea is boiling over the seal lamps, children playing on the caribou skin beds. Grandmother tells the old stories, everybody has a new one. Home is warm and cozy. It is only when the young ones slip out the door to play outside that we hear the winter wind.

5:00 PM - Episode 13: *Quviasukvik (Happy Day)*

Igloolik, Fall-Winter 1946. It's almost a month since the sun disappeared. Back in the stone house everyone wakes up to Christmas Day. For Inuit in 1946, Christmas is a strange mix of ritual, some from the old life and some from the new. But either way, with lots of meat from a good year hunting, and a warm shelter against the blowing cold, this is a joyful time for celebration and stories.



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