

## Animal imagery reflected in Inuit art exhibit

The exhibition, *Uumajut: Animal Imagery in Inuit Art*, currently on view at the Winnipeg Art Gallery explores the multifaceted theme of the relationship between man and animal. Both contemporary and prehistoric art of the Canadian Arctic reflect the theme.

This Inuit term *uumajut* is described by linguist Louis Jacques Dorais of Laval University, as "one who is living". In a literal sense, the term emphasizes the relationship between man and animal as an encounter between two living beings.

### Dorset collection

The earliest artifacts in the exhibition are from the Dorset period reflecting the Palaeoeskimo culture which existed in the Canadian Arctic between 500 B.C. and 1000 A.D. The artifacts, representing one of the largest single collections of Dorset sculptural art, were excavated at Brooman Point on Bathurst Island in the High Arctic.

Archaeologist Robert McGhee noted that almost half of the 81 art objects recovered

from the site are animal images. They include a predominance of bears as well as miniature carvings of seals, walrus and various species of bird. Many of the artifacts are pierced suggesting their function as a pin to be attached to one's clothing.

The incised markings on several of the bears and seals refer to the skeleton and joints. These markings, described as "form-codes", are a recurrent motif in Dorset art. In a cryptic and dualistic manner they refer to death and the regeneration of life, said Dr. McGhee.

### Contemporary works

References to the spiritual power of the animal and man's attempts to invoke that power are illustrated in several contemporary works in the exhibition. John Pangnark, attaches the ivory amulet of a bear's head to an abstract human figure carved in stone. In the whalebone sculpture by Manasie Akpialak of Arctic Bay, the artist portrays the kneeling figure of an older woman



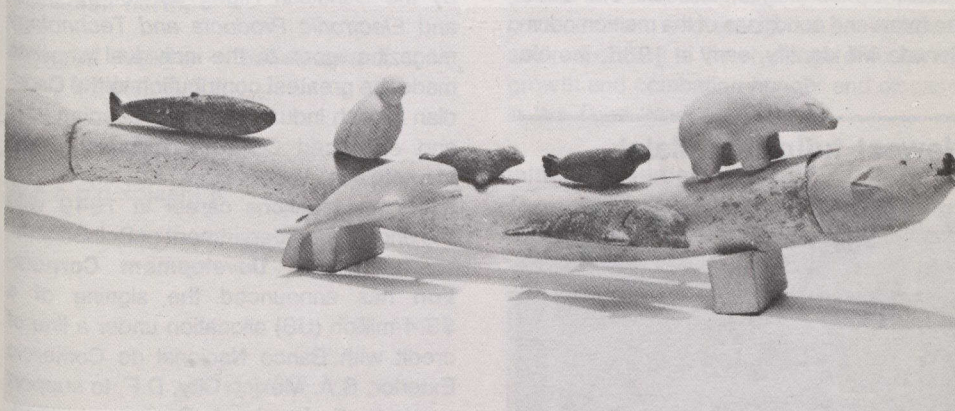
Hunter Killing Bear (1962) in grey stone and ivory by George Kopak Tayarak of Sugluk. invoking the spirit helper of a bird.

In addition to the symbolic attributes of the animal, the relationship between predator and prey is a well explored theme in contemporary Inuit art. The print-drawing by Ruth Qualluaryuk entitled *Predators* depicts the chain of life in which the death of one species gives life to another.

### Fruitful creation

Several works in the exhibition celebrate procreation and the fecundity of nature. In the assemblage by Simon Qanualuk of Ivujivik, the artist employs the bone of a walrus as the base of a carving supporting a variety of Arctic species including birds, fish, whales, seals and bears.

A concern with the esthetic and formal elements of art-making also characterizes the work of several sculptors in the exhibition.



Animals on Base with Bear Heads (1963) in stone and antler by Saima (Simon) Qaunnu.



Birds Perched on Skull (1968) in bone, wood, black insets and soap by Peter Qanuluk of Ivujivik.



Three Otters With Fish (1959) in black stone by Lucasi Tukala of Povungnituk.