

## OPENINGS

In 2012, the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race (CSER) inaugurated the Gallery at the Center with the goal of creating openings for exciting ideas in as many forms as possible. To date, the gallery has presented two outstanding photography shows. *Superheroes*, Dulce Pinzón's tour de force portraying Latino undocumented immigrants that withstand difficult labor conditions to help their communities survive and prosper, and *The Raging 70s*, a series of twenty stunning black-and-white images by Bolívar Arellano of Latino public figures, significant events, and everyday New York City life in the 1970s drawn from the Latino Arts and Activism collection at Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

This academic year's first new show, *Messages Across Time and Space: Inupiat Drawings from the 1890s* at Columbia University, builds upon the gallery's past work. Similar to prior exhibits, it includes visually striking images by artists of color that are not generally engaged with by art institutions nor are widely accessible to the communities that they originated in. As with *The Raging 70s*, the current exhibit also underscores the potential of curating from the rich archival holdings at Columbia's libraries, including its three hundred indigenous objects. Furthermore, the show's focus on Inupiat artists continues CSER's deep commitment to indigenous studies and the arts through all our programs, notably the Indigenous Studies track, the Indigenous Forum, the Summer Program in Indigenous Rights and Policy, Artists at the Center, and the Media and Idea Lab.

Simultaneously, *Messages Across Time and Space* breaks new ground. For the first time, the gallery invited a guest curator—with thrilling results. Led by art historian and Barnard professor Elizabeth Hutchinson, the show investigates the manifold layers of meaning present in indigenous art produced within the violent context of settler colonialism in late nineteenth century Alaska. Moreover, in pursuing this inquiry, the show raises key questions of power in the production, preservation, and exhibition of indigenous art and archives, and the limits of official archival knowledge in relation to indigenous cultural practices. As Hutchinson noted in an interview: "We had questions that the archive was not answering. We needed to consult native archives in whatever form that they exist. Sometimes we had to go to YouTube to engage with Native thought and self-expression."

The exhibit is also organized through the increasingly important practice of collaborative curation as a mode of inquiry and form of engagement. Hutchinson co-curated the show with nine Columbia graduate students who participated in her Spring 2015 seminar, "Repatriating Indigenous art in the Age of Globalization." By way of observation and contextualization of objects and practices, the group aimed to reframe archival materials to produce new understandings and foster connections among curators, diverse publics, and indigenous communities. As Christopher Green, one of the student co-curators, observed, "Our work showed us that the array of viewpoints in these works are accessible only when multiple voices, most importantly Inupiat voices, are able to weigh in."

The goal was then not only to enable more nuanced scholarship or develop curatorial skills, as significant as both practices were to the project. More fundamentally, it was about "bringing the work into native visibility" and contributing to the larger process of historical recovery and cultural survival led by indigenous communities. The drawings, created by Inupiat artists yet largely inaccessible to them, are not simply illustrations from the past. Not only are the portrayed dances and regalia still in use. These fine lines, at times jumping off the page, are also a foretelling—of more openings to come.

Frances Negrón-Muntaner  
Director and Chief Curator  
Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race  
Gallery at the Center

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the Gallery at the Center for giving us the opportunity to bring these works out of storage to where current students and community members can see the care and creativity with which indigenous artists confronted their changing world-a century ago. Working with the staff at CSER and Art Properties has been a wonderful experience. Thank you Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Teresa Aguayo, Roberto C. Ferrari, Lilian Vargas, and Larry Soucy. Working together as a class has helped us broaden our perspectives as scholars of art history, curatorial practice, and indigenous studies and we have benefitted tremendously from our discussions with each other and with the curators and artists who visited our class including Jennifer Kramer, G. Peter Jemison, Sonya Kellither-Combs, and Deborah Cullen. Finally, we are grateful to Professor Bush for including these beautiful and complex works in his collection and for donating them to Columbia so that future generations of Inupiat and non-Inupiat viewers can see them.

GALLERY at the CENTER  
CENTER FOR THE  
STUDY of Ethnicity and  
Columbia University  
420 Hamilton Hall  
New York City  
10027  
Openings - 4:00pm, Monday - Friday

## CATALOGUE

*Drawing A* (Inventory of regalia used for the Eagle-Wolf Dance)  
c. 1895

Pencil, ink and watercolor on paper  
DIMENSIONS TO COME  
Art Properties, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library Columbia University in the City of New York  
The Bush Collection of Religion and Culture  
(C00.1483.259)  
note: all drawings have the same dimensions, materials, and credit line

*Drawing B* (King Island Eagle-Wolf dancers)  
(C00.1483.300)

*Drawing C* (King Island Eagle-Wolf dancers with musicians and audience)  
(C00.1483.301)

*Drawing D* (Wolf Dance: the transformation of the eagles into wolves)  
(C00.1483.302)

*Drawing E* (Two men in different clothing with carved pipes)  
(C00.1483.303)

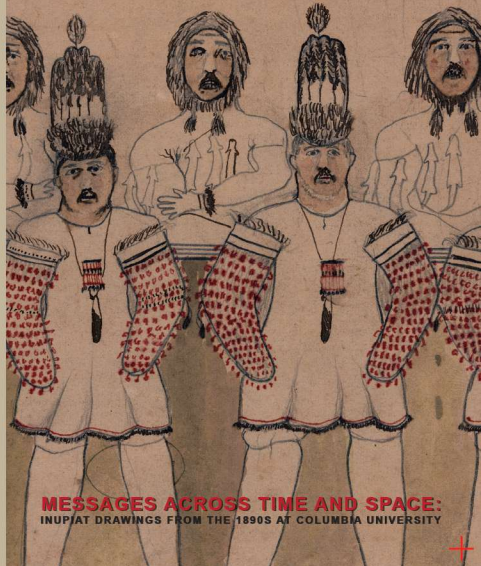
*Drawing F* (Two men in similar dress sharing berries)  
(C00.1483.304)

*Drawing G* (Line of men)  
(C00.1483.305)

*Drawing H* (Line of men)  
(C00.1483.306)

*Drawing I* (Ball game)  
(C00.1483.307)

*Drawing K* (Two women dancers in different clothing)  
(C00.1483.308)



MESSAGES ACROSS TIME AND SPACE:  
INUPIAT DRAWINGS FROM THE 1890S AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

GALLERY at the CENTER  
Columbia University  
September 22 – November 20, 2015

## MESSAGES ACROSS TIME AND SPACE: INUPIAT DRAWINGS FROM THE 1890S AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Elizabeth Hutchinson, associate professor of art history, with student curators Charlotte Basch, Cannelle Bruschini-Chaumet, Emilie Chedeville, Ariel Cohen, Sarah Diver, Christopher Green, Jamie Luria, Crystal Migwans, and Emily Rogers

### INTRODUCTION

The ten extraordinary drawings in this exhibition represent aspects of the *Kivgik* (Messenger Feast), a ceremonial complex performed in many Inupiat communities in Alaska. They offer a detailed depiction of the regalia and dance steps used by the participants who gathered from diverse communities to participate in the event. These dances continue to be performed today by the leaders of Inupiat villages in Western and Northern Alaska, in many cases resembling what is shown in these century-old drawings quite closely.

The drawings are now part of the collection of Columbia University Art Properties; they came to the university as part of the Bush Collection, an assemblage of works by non-European artists collected by Philosophy Professor Wendell Ter Bush in the early twentieth century for their religious significance and donated to the university in 1935. The collection was described by Professor Bush simply as "Eskimo drawings," and none are signed. This exhibition suggests that they were likely made by Seward Peninsula Inupiat people working closely with missionary teachers Tom and Ellen Lopp in the village of Kingigan in Wales, Alaska.

In spring 2015, members of a graduate seminar were tasked with finding out more about these understudied artworks. Looking closely at the objects and developing research questions that took us into the library, to museum collections, and to the



Drawing E (men with carved pipes)  
(COO.1483.303)



Drawing C. King Island Wolf Dancers with musicians and audience  
(COO.1483.301)

Internet in search of knowledge, we assembled the information presented on the captions in the gallery and on the companion website ([http://edblogs.columbia.edu/AHISG4862\\_001\\_2015\\_1/](http://edblogs.columbia.edu/AHISG4862_001_2015_1/)). We hope that making these images known will inspire further discussion of their origins and significance for both Inupiat and non-Inupiat viewers.

While Inupiat artists from many Inupiat communities have been making graphic art since ancient times, the format and content of these drawings is novel for its time, for the makers of these works engage Western strategies to imply volume and recession space. We do not know what these choices indicate, but both the subject matter and the format of these drawings are likely the result of the Lopp's influence.

As we argue, the drawings were created during a time of extreme hardship caused by the United States' colonization of Alaska Native territory. The artists used materials and worked with formats that were introduced by outsiders whose goal was to eradicate aspects of traditional life seen as incompatible with modern, civilized society. Nevertheless, these drawings are rich with meaning about Inupiat life and culture. We see them as confirming community values and practices across periods of historical and cultural change.



Drawing H. A procession of men  
(COO.1483.302)

### PUTTING THE DRAWINGS IN CONTEXT

For centuries Inupiat peoples have lived in autonomous villages on the Seward Peninsula and in interior parts of Northwest Alaska, following a subsistence lifestyle and trading local resources with outsiders, including both Native Alaskan neighbors and, beginning in the late eighteenth century, Europeans. The United States' connection to this region was initially grounded in whaling and, with the purchase of Alaska in 1869, the policing of international trade. US Federal Indian Policy played a small role in Alaska until the introduction of federally supported schools in Native communities in the 1880s under the leadership of Presbyterian missionary Sheldon Jackson.

Teachers hired by Jackson introduced literacy, Christianity, and wage labor in the form of a reindeer herding enterprise, not to mention disease to the region; a few years later, the Klondike Gold Rush brought unprecedented numbers of Americans into Alaska Native territory and allowing Inupiat material culture, such as these drawings, to flow out of the region.

These drawings may have been made for missionary teachers to send to their supporters or as souvenirs to trade with miners, sailors, or other visitors to the region for coveted commodities. Teachers in the US Indian school system often encouraged students to make drawings for sale as a means of gaining a personal income and increasing public support for the schools.

### THE KIVGİK

The *kivgik* is a mid-winter festival performed by members of Inupiat and Yup'ik communities in northwestern Alaska. It is traditionally held after a strong whale harvest, in a *qargi* (men's/community house), and involves feasting, dancing, exchanging gifts, storytelling, and athletic competitions. In the nineteenth century, the ceremonial helped spread resources between different regions and facilitated intercommunity relationships through trade and today the feast supports community renewal. Within the drawings, many of the images depict the Eagle-Wolf Dance, a ceremonial that celebrates the Eagle-Mother, who gave dancing, drumming, and singing to the Inupiat people. The range of regalia depicted suggests the participation

dance troupes and guests from different Inupiat villages, a tradition of gathering and exchange that is perpetuated today in the annual Kingmiut Dance Festival held in Wales since 1999, offering a profound and beautiful expression of survival and the ongoing vitality of this community and its traditions.

### A CLOSER LOOK

On the companion website, Emilie Chedeville notes that contemporary Inupiat artist Larry Ahvakana perpetuates historic tribal aesthetic practices as a means of pointing to the past and maintaining an education in Inupiat cultural values in the present. Like Ahvakana, the artists whose work is on display were memory keepers who used the materials presented to them in their own time to speak to Inupiat communities of the past and those yet to come.

Despite changes in media over time, Inupiat artists have repeatedly returned to the same themes—the nuclear family, the home, hunting, and ceremony. In doing so, they have repeatedly reclaimed craftsmanship, attention to materials, and formal strategies—such as the graphic representation of narrative and movement—as aspects of a transhistorical Inupiat aesthetic. The care with which this group of artists undertook the task of documenting the *kivgik*, an essential event in Inupiat ceremonial life, resulted in clear records of significant components of that ritual, the details of the material objects involved, and the identities of the participants. Moreover, the drawings use composition, style, and technique to endow these details with affective meaning, calling an informed viewer's attention to the artists' mastery of the ideas and values that underlie the Messenger Feast.

For example, in Drawing C, the artist has indicated the relative importance of the human figures depicted by varying the amount of detail with which they are rendered—the dancers are carefully depicted in multiple colors while the viewers and musicians are sketched in with simple pencil outlines.



Drawing K.  
Two women dancers  
in different clothing  
(COO.1483.308)



Drawing K.  
Reverse side

At the same time, the artist shows the significance of witnessing the ceremonial by emphasizing the viewers' eyes, which, though only shown as simple dots, seem riveted on the performance. Finally, the awkward poses of the dancers—including elevated, straight arms and a backward-leaning pose that seems difficult to balance—calls our attention to the strength and discipline demonstrated by dancers who are executing their moves with precision. A similar sense of mastery over the details of the ceremonial might be found in simpler form in Drawing H (306), in which the artist has carefully conveyed the identity of each figure by carefully delineating facial features, stature, and details of clothing.

It is important to emphasize that these artists did not create the drawings out of a sense of nostalgia for a lost past, but instead were engaged in documenting cultural activities in a time of great change using the tools at their disposal. This is apparent in the fact that the drawings were made with school supplies—colored pencils and paper. One drawing, however, adds a level of gravitas to this work. On the back of Drawing K, the artist has inserted a self-portrait into a tableau dedicated to "great artists," indicating an understanding of the significance of art in both American and Inupiat cultures.