

Radical Remembrance: The Sculptures of David Ruben Piqtoukun

Sponsor: Canadian North

Since 1972, sculptor David Ruben Piqtoukun has worked with stone, metal, wood, and bone to share stories inspired by ancient Inuit knowledge. He often combines these different materials in complex ways to visually enhance and preserve such narratives that have been passed down through generations. While Piqtoukun's traditional education was interrupted by his experience in the residential school system, he continues his radical remembrances in every sculpture he carves. This exhibition features Piqtoukun's recent sculptures that highlight his material inventiveness and narrative vision. While beautiful, his work also carries a sense of the precarious, raw, and emotional sides of our existence. After 50 years, Piqtoukun was recognized for his innovation and leadership with a 2022 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts. He was born in Paulatuk, Northwest Territories, in what is now the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, and is currently based in Southern Ontario.

Shaman

1986

brown Brazilian stone, antler, fur, wood, ivory, and red Arizona pipestone inlay

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 1989

Mask

around 1980

stone and painted metal

On loan from private collection

Global Melt

2021

Brazilian soapstone and wood base

Courtesy of the artist

Presented in case:

Queen Elizabeth

around 1998

soapstone, alabaster, catlinite (pipestone), and sinew

On loan from private collection

Shaman's Trip to the Moon

1996

Brazilian soapstone, Italian alabaster, African wonderstone, and desktop computer parts

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 2001

In a digital-age twist on a timeless story, David Ruben Piqtoukun references the ability of a Shaman to travel to the moon, by way of a desktop computer. Appearing to the viewer as a bird peering out from the empty space that once held a monitor, this Shaman is ready for takeoff to the far side of the moon.

Shaman in Flight

2000

stone and wood

On loan from private collection

Shaman Crash Landing

2001

stone and bone

On loan from private collection

SHAMAN IN FLIGHT and SHAMAN CRASH LANDING

In Inuit spirituality, Shamans have the responsibility of mediating the spaces between our world, and within the spirit world. The sea, land, and skies are alive with spirits—some helpful, some mischievous, and others that are more hostile. In order to do this important work, Shamans have a wide range of supernatural skills, including the ability to journey down to Sedna's house under the sea or to travel to the moon. They are also known to fly, either by astral projecting or by using their magical abilities to transform into winged animals such as hawks, owls, and ravens. In *Shaman in Flight* and *Shaman Crash Landing*, David Ruben Piqtoukun playfully alludes to the Shamanic ability to fly, this time by way of an airplane.

W3-1119 (Asteroid Particle)

2022

Italian alabaster and marble base

Courtesy of the artist

Thar She Blows!

2021

blue whale jawbone, steel, and acrylic paint

Courtesy of the artist

Coated in a layer of bright paint, this giant sculpture made from a blue whale jawbone references a colloquial phrase that often gets shouted by whalers and onlookers as a whale breaches out of the water. The work is also a commentary on the current well-being of whales as many species face extinction, and the hope that no one will ever need to call out “Thar she blows!” for the very last time.

The Sun, Star, Moon and Universe

2022

Mexican fire alabaster and metal base

Courtesy of the artist

Mask

1983

grey stone, animal hair, and sinew

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 1989

Presented in case:

Mystical Shape

around 1980

stone, animal hair, and antler

On loan from private collection

Flying Figure

1985

green stone, antler, bronze, and red Arizona pipestone inlay

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 1989

Forte

2011

African opal, antler, and guitar strings

Courtesy of the artist

Baby Brontosaurus

2022

blue whale rib and steel stands

Courtesy of the artist

Long, elegant, and getting used to a new pair of legs, this baby brontosaurus has just emerged into the world and is seeing everything for the very first time. Peering around with a young face, the piece carved in blue whale rib serves as a reminder that these great animals once roamed the Earth.

Escape the Moon

2020

wood, metal, Brazilian soapstone, Italian alabaster, red Arizona pipestone, black pipestone, and sinew

On loan from the collection of Dr. A.B. Kliefoth III, MD

Presented in case:

The Birth of Sedna

2022

Brazilian soapstone and red Arizona pipestone

Courtesy of the artist

Shaman's Dream of the Past

2022

Brazilian soapstone

Courtesy of the artist

Raven Steals the Moon

2022

Brazilian soapstone, red Arizona pipestone, and black pearl stone

Courtesy of the artist

Lost Souls in the City

1996

Ontario marble, Brazilian soapstone, and African wonderstone

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 2001

Wandering among the skyscrapers, these lost souls are trying to make their way in the big city. With many Inuit now establishing homes in southern Canada instead of the Arctic, adapting to urban life presents both challenges and opportunities—and sometimes a feeling of being lost in a new environment.

Bear Man with Drum

2018

bronze

Courtesy of the artist

Shaman Protecting the Pearl of Wisdom

2015

Brazilian soapstone, caribou antler, and alabaster

Courtesy of the artist

Presented on wall:

Fish Spirit Mask

2022

cedar wood and nails

Courtesy of the artist

One-Eyed Shaman Mask

2016

cedar wood, nails, and red Arizona pipestone

Courtesy of the artist

Raven Steals the Moon

2021

Brazilian soapstone and steel frame

Courtesy of the artist

RAVEN STEALS THE MOON

In this sculpture, a Shaman appears as both human and bird, with pieces of the moon stuck in his beak. Piqtoukun tells the story of a Shaman who was not respected by the people in his community because they did not believe in his powers. In order to prove himself, he tells them that he will steal the moon and bring it back. He asks everyone to cover him with rocks and snow, and uses his powers to steal the moon from the sky. The world goes dark, and the people cannot hunt or fish. When he is satisfied that everyone

believes in his powers, he returns the moon to the sky and is met with rewards from his community, such as a new *qamutik* (sled). The moral of the story is that there is always a cost for everything.

Presented in case:

Shaman Returning from the Moon

2002

Brazilian soapstone, Italian alabaster, and black pearl stone

On loan from the collection of Elizabeth McLean

Sedna

1994

Mottled grey Brazilian soapstone, inlaid alabaster, and African soapstone

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 2001

Shaman Holding Bolas

1983

brown Brazilian stone, white stone, sinew, and mottled brown-green stone

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 1990

Generations

1995

Brazilian soapstone

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 2001

Inua

1984

grey Brazilian stone, ivory, red Arizona pipestone, black African wonderstone, and antler inlay

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 1996

Inua, the spiritual force that imbues all things, is depicted here in visions of masks and animals. In Inuit worldview, human beings belong to a complex and interwoven spiritual ecosystem based on the careful observation of spiritual laws and reciprocity. This balance is illustrated through such an arrangement of spirits, all of whom rely on one another.

Bear

1982

white stone

On loan from private collection

People of the Midnight Sun

2017

Brazilian soapstone, black pearl stone, red Arizona pipestone,
and steel frame

Courtesy of the artist

Shaman

1989

brown Brazilian stone, caribou antler, red Arizona pipestone, and
white stone inlay

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 1996

Shaman Muskox Transformation

2010

Brazilian soapstone, antler, and polar bear fur

On loan from private collection

Survivors of the Ice Age and now found across the circumpolar world, muskox lived alongside Inuit for many generations. Here, we see a Shaman mid-transformation between man and muskox; a long, white beard crafted in polar bear fur sprouts from his chin, while horns carved from antler grow from a face that is still human in nature.

Division of Meat

1996

Brazilian soapstone

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 2001

A fresh catch of meat is a family affair, and often a community effort. An ulu—the half-moon knife that was typically used by women—is lodged securely in a chunk of meat, as though its owner has set it down momentarily during the processing and feasting. It is rare for a division of meat to take place on a table or counter, and it is very likely this animal is being broken down on the ground with a family gathered around.

Dog with Man-Tail

1983

green Brazilian stone and red Arizona pipestone inlay

Gift of Samuel and Esther Sarick, 1989

Angry Bear

2022

Brazilian soapstone, black pearl stone, and red Arizona pipestone

On loan from the collection of Pamela J. Bell-Kurlowicz

Bottom Fish Man

2019

Brazilian soapstone, black pearl stone, and red Arizona pipestone

Courtesy of the artist

Many Children

2021

Brazilian soapstone and red Arizona pipestone

Courtesy of the artist

Presented in case:

Man Who Walks with Bear (Fears No One, Has No Enemies)

2022

Brazilian soapstone

Courtesy of the artist

Blind Shaman

2022

Brazilian soapstone and wood

On loan from the collection of Dr. A.B. Kliefoth III, MD

Bird Spirit Offering

2010

Brazilian soapstone

On loan from the collection of Jim McCloskey

Hooluaq

2020

Brazilian soapstone

On loan from the collection of Steven Gibson

Big Fish

1989

Brazilian soapstone

On loan from the collection of Jim McCloskey

Shaman with Spring Bird

2022

Brazilian soapstone and black pearl stone

Courtesy of the artist