Mattiusi Iyaituk : Sculptor, Ivijivik

Mattiusi Iyaituk was born in 1950 at Cape Smith, near present-day Akulivik. His mother Lucy, who lost her eyesight when Mattiusi was a young boy, taught him to be patient and to use his imagination. As a teenager, Mattiusi sometimes carved with his older brother Nataraluk, a talented and prolific carver. Eventually, Mattiusi developed a style very different from the realistic style of Nataraluk and the other artists in his community. Mattiusi quickly gained in reputation as collectors began to appreciate his unusual and often humorous work. In 1978, his work was part of an exhibition by the Embankment Gallery in London England and in 1981, he was honoured with a solo show at the Images of the North Gallery in San Francisco, California. More recently, the Spirit Wrestler Gallery in Vancouver produced a catalogued show of Mattiusi’s work in 2000.

Mattiusi’s carvings are typically devoid of surface detail and instead, are made of gentle curves that hint at an underlying form. Mattiusi cleverly mixes materials such as different stones, caribou antler, musk ox hair and the like to create dramatic and beautiful works of art. His way of seeing things and his interpretation of Inuit legends add a lot to the appeal of his art. Inuit lore is for him a constant source of ideas but occasionally, an observation becomes, through his sculpture, a comment on the joy (or absurdity!) of life.

Today, Mattiusi’s art can be found in museum collections across Canada and in the U.S. His sculpture has been featured in more than 50 gallery exhibitions, 10 of them one-man-shows. His work has been published in over 20 books. Mattiusi himself is often solicited to speak in America and Europe at conferences relating to Inuit art.

“When you look at my sculpture, you don’t understand all of it. For this reason, you have the freedom to dream. Everyone has their own opinions about art so I just put titles for each piece and leave the rest for dreams.”

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