

Panel 5D: Greenland Exhibited and Collected: Museums and the Mediation of Colonial Knowledge

Format: Paper panel in English

Convener: [Bart Pushaw/The Art of Nordic Colonialism: Writing Transcultural Art Histories](#)

Moderators: [Kirstine Møller](#) & [Mathias Danbolt](#)

Panel 5D abstract: Greenland's visual and material culture face formidable challenges in the twenty-first-century museum. Haunted by the specter of ethnographic authenticity, Greenlandic objects have been collected, promoted, and exhibited as "artifact" more often than "art". Still today, the country's expressive culture remains scattered across disparate museums, archives, and private collections in multiple countries. As museums across the Global North wrestle with the colonial origins of their collections more publicly than ever before, it is indubitably urgent to redress the current state of collections of Greenlandic art and visual culture. This panel seeks to intervene into this discussion by sparking critical dialogue and debate surrounding the pasts, presents, and futures of Greenlandic material culture—by Inuit as well as non-Inuit makers—in museum settings.

We invite papers in a range of formats, from traditional paper presentations to artistic interventions that may address the following questions:

How have museum collections functioned as repositories of colonial knowledge regarding Greenland?

What collection or exhibition practices shaped or continue to shape ideas of Greenlandic art and culture?

What conditions or problems characterize the current status of Greenlandic material culture in museums?

How do museums relate Greenlandic objects to local, regional (Arctic/Circumpolar), imperial, and/or international narratives?

How might we envision a responsible or ethical curatorial practice?

How could "interventions" into existing museum spaces be imagined – and by and for whom would they be?

Paper 5D.1 [Bart Pushaw](#): Rediscover, Reprint, Repatriate: Museums and the Politics of Inuit Painting

Paper 5D.2 [Ingeborg Høvik](#): Exhibiting the Indigenous Arctic Explorer: Greenlandic Portraits in Britain

Paper 5D.3 [Mathias Danbolt](#): Bastardized Creations in/of the Colonial Museum: Intermixtures of Greenlandic and Sámi Objects in the Collection of University Museum of Bergen

Paper 5D.4 [Anne Vestergaard Jørgensen](#): "An unusual artist": Jacob Danielsen at Statens Museum for Kunst in 1941

Paper 5D.5 [Nivi Christensen](#): Curating the Point of View through Greenlandic Landscapes

Paper 5D.1. abstract

Bart Pushaw: Rediscover, Reprint, Repatriate: Museums and the Politics of Inuit Painting

This presentation investigates the role of museums in affecting historiographical shifts of nineteenth-century Inuit art. The locations of nineteenth-century painting are particularly ripe for reconsideration given the complicated colonial subjectivity of their makers. Unlike many Inuit objects in European museum collections, colonial-era painting was commissioned rather than confiscated, anticipating the later deliberate facture of "ethnographic" material that characterized those objects collected under Knud Rasmussen's Circumpolar expeditions in the 1920s. In order to understand changing relationship to this heritage, the paper charts the shifting cultural and political attitudes, from the "rediscovery" of watercolors and prints at the Danish National Museum in the 1960s, and a partial repatriation to Kalaallit Nunaat in 1982, to the new interest that circulated among Inuit imagery in Norwegian collections in the 1990s. These various acts of rediscovery, reprinting, and repatriation have created a distinct canon of Greenlandic art that hails Aron of Kangeq as the "first" professional artist of Inuit descent, a historical legacy that contemporary Kalaallit artists would incorporate into their own simultaneous practice. By contrast, those images that have remained "known" received no such acclaim or visibility, and therefore continue to function as auto-ethnographic illustrations, their display unchanged since their acquisition under imperial auspices. By advocating for critical attention to those images left behind in ongoing debates about the proper custodians of Inuit material culture, I hope to spark debate about the more precarious situation of colonial Inuit visual culture, and contribute nuances about the place of Indigenous colonial actors in current debates about decolonization.

Paper 5D.2 abstract

Ingeborg Høvik: Exhibiting the Indigenous Arctic Explorer: Greenlandic Portraits in Britain

In British museums there are two oil paintings from the first half of the 19th century that show Greenlandic individuals. Painted by Alexander Nasmyth (1758-1840) around 1818, the earlier portrait forms part of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery's collection and shows Zakæus (1792-1819), a young Inuk from Ilulissat. Painted by an unknown British artist between 1851 and 1855, the later portrait forms part of the National Maritime Museum's collection in London. It shows

Inughuit, Qalaseq/Qalasiirssuaq (d. 1856), a young Inughuit from Qaanaaq. Zakæus and Qalaseq/Qalasiirssuaq separately took part in the British exploration of the Arctic in the first half of the nineteenth century and lived in British society for several years before their untimely deaths from European diseases. Although there are similarities between their stories, the terms of their stay in British society were highly different. Zakæus left Greenland at his own initiative and had the opportunity to return home. He enjoyed an independent existence in Edinburgh and voluntarily took part as paid “interpreter” onboard John Ross’s first Arctic expedition in 1818. By contrast, Qalaseq/Qalasiirssuaq had little say in his own fate after encountering the British explorers in Qaanaaq in 1850. Coerced by the explorers to leave his native home to go with them, Qalaseq/Qalasiirssuaq subsequently became both a servant and tool of Empire and a “specimen” of racial science. This paper explores how the contrasting terms of the men’s stay and interaction with British society affected the production and museum acquisition of the portraits. Examining the portraits’ exhibition histories, I then discuss how the different museum contexts shape our understanding of the portraits and the men portrayed. How do the SNPG and NMM relate the portraits to artistic, local and imperial narratives?

Paper 5D.3 abstract

Mathias Danbolt: Bastardized Creations in/of the Colonial Museum: Intermixtures of Greenlandic and Sámi Objects in the Collection of University Museum of Bergen

Objects from colonized territories including Greenland and Sápmi were understood to be of vital importance to proper research collections upon the establishment of the University Museum of Bergen in 1825. When the institution’s founding “father” Wilhelm Friman Koren Christie went in search for a Sámi drum to include in the collection, he bought a frame drum with a large drumhead with an intricate pattern of symbols identical to the drum seen in a famous print in the Danish missionary Knud Leem’s seminal book “An Account of the Laplanders of Finmark...” from 1767. But in the 1950s what the museum had presented as a Sámi drum was revealed to have been a fabrication. As historical Sámi drums were scarce, someone had transferred the design of the drum in Leem’s book onto an old Inuit drum from Greenland and presented it as an authentic Sámi object. In this paper, I use this “bastardized” Inuit-turned-into-Sámi drum as an entry point to discuss the function of ethnographic objects in colonial collections. This forged transcultural hybrid drum not only stand as an anachronistic symbol for the clashes and interconnections between the colonial histories of Sápmi and Greenland in a Danish-Norwegian museum context, the drum also effectively demonstrates how colonial knowledge often have sought to create the “ethnic” object in its own image – an image highly depended on the displacement and replacement of indigenous histories and perspectives, as well as the truth of the colonial collections’ destructive-productive labor of creation. Drawing on Pia Arke and Erik Gant’s conceptualizations of “ethno-aesthetics” and its processes of “bastardization”, the paper ends with a discussion of Sámi artist and architect Joar Nango’s attempt of creating a context for a critical re-indigenization of this historical Inuit drum in his 2020 exhibition at Bergen Kunsthall.

Paper 5D.4 abstract

Anne Vestergaard Jørgensen: “An unusual artist”: Jacob Danielsen at Statens Museum for Kunst in 1941

In 1941, some 300 watercolours and drawings by Greenlandic artist Jacob Danielsen (1888-1938) were exhibited at Statens Museum for Kunst (SMK) in Copenhagen. The exhibition did not go unnoticed in the Danish newspapers; under different variations of the title “Greenlandic huntsman as artists”, the exhibition was presented as no less than a sensation: for the first time a Greenlandic artist was exhibited at the art museum. And it was not an artist in the usual sense, but a seal hunter. “Our editors in the capital write about an unusual artist” as the local newspaper at Lolland-Falster wrote a couple of days after the opening. To the director of the SMK, Leo Swane, Jacob Danielsen’s works likewise represented something beyond a simple categorization as either Art or artifact. In a letter to the former governor (landsfoged) of Greenland and owner of the Danielsen works, Ph. Rosendahl, Swane stated that “I find it only natural that these works have first been presented to men of the natural sciences. Yet they indeed also deserve to be considered as small works of art”. Further, Swane wrote that these works “in time, hopefully, could find their final place in our collection”. Instead, the works were donated to the national museum - SMK’s ethnographic equivalent. Neither perceived as fully ‘Art’ nor only ‘ethnography’, the 1941 exhibition and (non)collecting of Danielsen’s works at the SMK were a navigation along and in-between such categories. This paper will explore the uneasiness and difficulty that Danielsen’s works present in the archive of the SMK and in newspapers of the time.

Paper 5D.5 abstract

Nivi Christensen: Curating the Point of View through Greenlandic Landscapes

For centuries, Greenland has been the subject of Danish and European gazes. Many Danish artists have traveled to Greenland to depict the land far to the North. Nuuk Art Museum is actively taking a stand shifting the focus from what

is looked upon, to how and why it is looked upon. Nuuk Art Museum contains an extended collection of artworks made by these Danish artists. This paper will reflect on the perspectives of those works, alongside examples of how Greenlandic artists have depicted the local landscape.

The field of Danish artists encompasses such figures as Aage Gitz-Johansen (1897-1977), Ellen Locher Thalbitzer (1883-1956), Emanuel A. Petersen (1894-1948), and Jette Bang (1914-1964), whereas the Greenlandic artists include Niels Lynge (1880-1965), Hans Lynge (1906-1988), Jakob Danielsen (1888-1938), Anne-Birthe Hove (1951-2012), Arnannguaq Høegh (1956-2020) and Kristine Spore Kreutzmann (1989). Through their works, all exhibited at Nuuk Art Museum, the paper investigates the different ways of including and depicting Greenlandic nature. The paper includes works by Pia Arke (1958-2007) as a curatorial framework for the way of curating the points of view at Nuuk Art Museum.