

Isuma Represents Canada at the Venice Biennale

May 9, 2019 2:08 PM



Isuma. 2019. Installation view at the Canada Pavilion for the 58th International Art Exhibition - la Biennale di Venezia, May 2019. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada and Isuma Distribution International. Photo: Francesco Barascutti

The first-ever presentation of Inuit art in the newly restored Canadian pavilion at the Venice Biennale has opened. The three-part digital media project by the artist collective Isuma considers the forced relocation of families from an Inuit perspective.

Isuma, led by Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, is showing a video installation of its latest dramatic film, *One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk*, which recreates an encounter on Baffin Island in 1961 when one Inuit family was ordered off the land

From the same place, 58 years later, Isuma webcasts *Silakut Live from the Floe Edge* as a multinational mining company plans a railroad and supertanker shipping past the Inuit communities of Igloolik and Pond Inlet.

The exhibition also includes *Isuma Online*, a collection of Inuit and other Indigenous-language films available on iTunes and IsumaTV.

"Isuma illuminates the consequences of Canada's relocation of Inuit in the 1950s and '60s in order to reclaim history today and imagine a different future," says Isuma.

The name Isuma evokes thinking, a state of thoughtfulness, intelligence or an idea.

The team of five curators that organized the presentation noted Isuma's role in working against persistent historic trauma to recover and sustain stories, language and traditions.

"We are inspired by the ways in which Isuma's media activism forges networks among Indigenous peoples and beyond, thoughtfully mobilizing new communities of resistance,"

the curators said. "The artists' presentation in Venice offers models of radical inclusivity and digital democracy."

The five curators are Asinnajaq, an artist, writer and curator from Inukjuak, Nunavik; Catherine Crowston, executive director of the Art Gallery of Alberta; Barbara Fischer, executive director of the Art Museum at the University of Toronto; Candice Hopkins, senior curator of the Toronto Biennial of Art; and Josée Drouin-Brisebois, senior curator of contemporary art at the National Gallery.

One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk

Digital video installation, 112 minutes, Inuktitut-English, 2019

In April 1961, John Kennedy is America's new president, the Cold War heats up in Berlin and nuclear bombers are deployed from bases in Arctic Canada. In Kapuivik, north Baffin Island, Noah Piugattuk's nomadic Inuit band live and hunt by dog team as his ancestors did when he was born in 1900. When the white man known as Boss arrives at Piugattuk's hunting camp, what appears as a chance meeting soon opens up the prospect of momentous change. Boss is an agent of the government, assigned to get Piugattuk to move his band to settlement housing and send his children to school so they

can get jobs and make money. But Kapuivik is Piugattuk's homeland. He takes no part in the Canadian experience; and cannot imagine what his children would do with money.

Isuma Online isuma.tv

Isuma's exhibition in cyberspace presents a collection of Isuma and other Indigenous-language films on iTunes in 30 countries with subtitles in English, Italian, French, Spanish and German. *Isuma Online* features *Silakut Live from the Floe Edge* webcasts, the complete archive of Igloolik's Inuktitut video production since 1985, and more than 7,000 international Indigenous films and videos in 75 languages. IsumaTV's network of local servers in remote Inuit communities makes the exhibition available in regions where high-cost and low-bandwidth prevent fair access to Internet media. *Isuma Online* also offers a free exhibition catalogue with critical essays, scripts, background information, behind-the-scenes photographs and links to all films.

Silakut Live from the Floe Edge

Some 58 years after Boss ordered Piugattuk off his homeland into a government settlement, a mining company proposes building a railroad across Baffin Island to ship 30 million tons of iron ore annually by supertanker through walrus breeding grounds within view of Piugattuk's former home site at Kapuivik. Isuma will webcast *Silakut Live from*

the Floe Edge from May 8 to May 11, consulting Igloodik hunting families on the impact and benefits of the mine's proposed expansion. **From Sept. 16** to Sept. 21, Isuma will webcast *Silakut Live* from Pond Inlet, where public hearings will review the mine's environmental impact statement. *Silakut Live* brings global media transparency to the consequences of forced relocation to worldwide viewers. A schedule of *Silakut Live* webcasts online and transmitted to select theatres in Canada and other participating locations can be found at isuma.tv/live.

Source: National Gallery of Canada