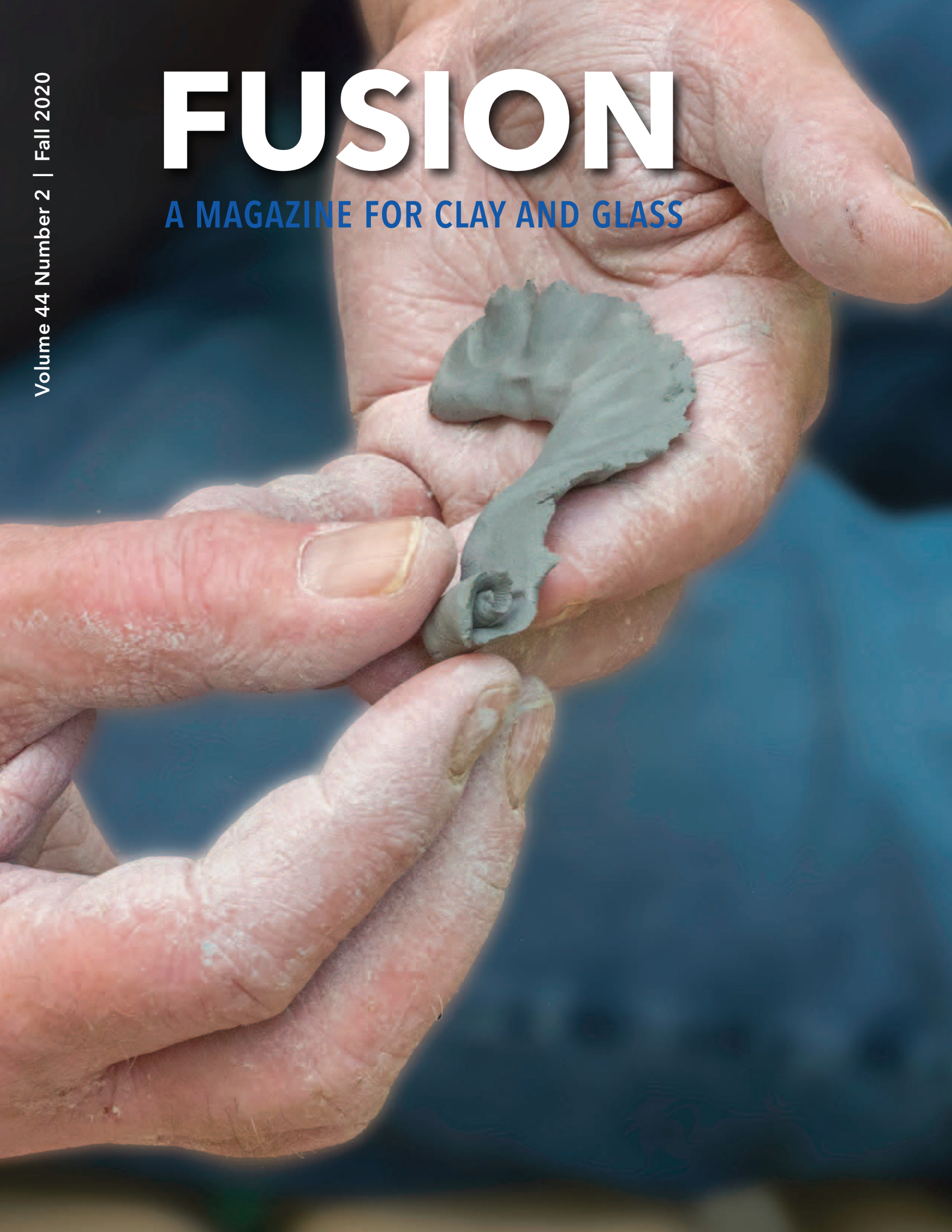


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Atautsikut/Leaving None Behind: La Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec





John Houston with Alicie Kasudluak Nivixie and “First Caribou,” Inukjuak, Nunavik, August, 2017. Image: John Houston.

Grocery store, community centre, gallery, ship centre, artist workspace: the co-op is a center of cultural, social, and economic life in Canadian Arctic communities.

Many in Southern Canada know the co-ops through their support of Inuit art: from famous works such as Kenojuak Ashevak’s *Enchanted Owl* (1960), that so captured the artistic eye and imagination, or the Ookpik that symbolized Canada during Expo ‘67; to the stylized Inukshuk used as an emblem of the 2010 Winter Olympics; to the Kinngait Studios (Cape Dorset) Annual Print Collection still sought after by art collectors worldwide. Or the instantly recognizable Igloo Tag: originally an initiative of the Canadian federal government to mark authentic works of Inuit art, now a trademark and source of pride in Inuit hands under the purview of the Inuit Art Foundation.¹

Yet while many households may be graced by a dancing bear carving or a sculpture of a languorous loon, few know the history of the North – particularly the co-operatives – that first empowered and continue to make Inuit art thrive.

The colonization of Canada’s Arctic remains within the living memory of Elders in Inuit communities across Inuit Nunangat, which, for 5,000 years, stretched from the shores of the Chukotka Peninsula of Russia,

east across Alaska and Canada, to the southeastern coast of Greenland.² Today Inuit Nunangat has four regions: the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (northern Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (northern Québec) and Nunatsiavut (northern Labrador). It includes 53 communities across roughly 35% of Canada’s land mass and 50% of its coastline. Co-operatives remain the foundation of each community, with Kinngait Studios being the most recognizable and most famous for its print collection.

This is a story about *La Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec* (FCNQ) who, in 1967, broke from the hegemony of the Hudson’s Bay Company to create a model for Inuit-owned co-ops.³ Owned by its 14 member co-ops in Inuit communities of the Hudson and Ungava coasts of Nunavik, FCNQ is more than “just a store”: it operates retail merchandise shops; provides banking, mail and IT services; runs hotels, travel agencies, hunting and fishing camps; stores and distributes fuel; manages construction projects; offers business support such as human resources and auditing; and markets Inuit art worldwide. Managed by Inuit and Cree staff, FCNQ embodies a founding vision of its community: *Atautsikut*, or “Together, leaving none behind.”

Art history buffs may know the story of James Houston’s 1948 drawing journey to the Canadian Arctic and the caribou carving by Conlucy Nayoumealook that sparked an idea;

Page 10, top: Puvirnituq, Nunavik Community Screening of *Atautsikut / Leaving None Behind*, December 13, 2019. Image: John Houston.

Page 10, bottom: Nunavik Cooperative Map, film still from *Atautsikut / Leaving None Behind*, December 13, 2019.

Mattiusi Iyaituk, John Houston and Shaman, Ivujivik, 2017.
Image: John Houston.



his work, with Peter Murdoch, to bring Inuit art to the South and to international audiences; and his establishment, co-founded with his wife Alma Huston, of the powerhouse that today is Kinngait Studios.⁴

Yet *Atautsikut/Leaving None Behind*, the 2019 film collaboration by Inuit knowledge keepers, artists and community members, with John Houston, witnesses that FCNQ was the first co-operative federation established in the Arctic by an Inuit community coming together.⁵ The film tells the intimate history of establishing, first, a single co-op at Kangiqsualujuaq (George River) and then a federation, a story of success and the power of community.

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) held a stranglehold over economic production and life in the North, profiting from the devastating consequences of European colonization on Inuit self-reliance.⁶ Government assimilation and forced relocation policies, food insecurity, fur trade economics and politics: all positioned HBC

stores, as a monopoly business, to extort Inuit communities through predatory credit and loans for basic necessities and supplies that Inuit had once, not long ago, provided for themselves.

In 1959, Inuit came together in Kangiqsualujuaq to create the first Inuit-owned co-operative.⁷ After a fiercely negotiated \$12,500 loan from the Canadian federal government to buy fishing equipment, this was the start of Inuit communities' return to self-governance. The film captures these times and learnings through the Oral Tradition of Aliva Tulugaq and Willie Etok, among others; as well as through family reminiscence, as when Harry Surusila shares the story of his mother's *qulliq* (oil lamp), taken piece by piece and turned into carvings. Working from their traditional hunting, sewing and carving skills, Inuit first invested in themselves to establish a co-op that, in turn, reinvested in their community by saving 5% from sales into a mutual fund.⁸

The Kangiqsualujjuaq co-op was also a spiritual return to Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, Inuit traditional knowledge, meaning “that which Inuit have always known to be true.”⁹

That truth was working together as a community: to uplift each other, share knowledge and experience. Through self-governance, Inuit advocated for themselves rather than through government representatives; led their own initiatives; and produced and marketed their own work. Within two years co-ops were springing up all over the Arctic;¹⁰ and, in 1967, Inuit and Cree delegates incorporated *La Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec* (FCNQ) to represent Nunavik co-ops and drafted its by-laws.¹¹ And eventually, Inuit became mentors of their practice: *Atautsikut/Leaving None Behind* follows an Inuit delegation to Chile, where they share their experience with emerging Indigenous co-ops.

What began, then, as an investment in stone carvings that remain a symbol of Inuit art all over the world, was founded on traditional skills – from life on the land – adapted for a non-Inuit economy, beginning with the market for art and craft. Hunters transferred their skills to carving, making art as well as tools. Seamstresses still sewed clothing and wall hangings but also made dolls for play or display.

Grocery store, community centre, gallery, ship centre, artist workspace: “What the Inuit need, the co-op will eventually build.”¹² In Nunavik, co-operatives have always helped each other; if one was struggling, the others stepped in. Collaboration was, and continues to be, the true spirit and power. In all media – sculpture, printmaking, carving, textile arts, graphic design, jewelry, pottery – Inuit art is vibrant and flourishing. As Aliva Tulugaq says, “Making by hand has value”.¹³ in the communal hands that create the space for the making, as well as in the maker’s hands.

Learn more about the film *Atautsikut/Leaving None Behind* <https://leavingnonebehind.com/the-film/> and about FCNQ <http://www.fcnq.ca/en/histoire/>.



Crew of *Atautsikut / Leaving None Behind* filming Mattiusi Iyaituk, Iuvjivik, 2017. Image: John Houston.

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¹ <https://www.inuitartfoundation.org/igloo-tag-trademark/about-igloo-tag>, accessed July 5, 2020.

² All references to Inuit Nunangat this paragraph <https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/inuit-nunangat/>, accessed July 7, 2020.

³ All FCNQ references this paragraph <https://leavingnonebehind.com/>, accessed July 5, 2020.

⁴ Formerly the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative.

⁵ *Atautsikut/Leaving None Behind*, 2019, a film by John Houston with Bobby Barron, Willie Etok, Aliva Tulugak, Noah Sheshamush, Zebedee Nungak, Harry Surusila, Sarollie Weetaluktuk, Lucassie Napaluk, Sarah Grey, Lucy Grey, Elijah Grey, Peter Qumaluk “Peter Boy” Ittukallak, Bobby “Snowball” Aputiarjuk, Mary Johannes, and The Revd Aibelie Napartuk.

⁶ All HBC references this paragraph *Atautsikut/Leaving None Behind*, 2019.

⁷ <http://www.fcnq.ca/en/histoire/>, accessed July 5, 2020.

⁸ Idea credited to Peter Murdoch, *Atautsikut/Leaving None Behind*, 2019.

⁹ <https://www.cnsa-nccah.ca/docs/health/FS-InuitQaujimajatuqangitWellnessNunavut-Tagalik-EN.pdf>, accessed July 5, 2020.

¹⁰ <http://www.fcnq.ca/en/histoire/>, accessed July 5, 2020.

¹¹ <http://www.fcnq.ca/en/histoire/>, accessed July 5, 2020.

¹² Sokchiveneath Taing Chhoan, Senior Manager, Socio-Economic Development, FCNQ, in conversation with John Houston following a screening of *Atautsikut/Leaving None Behind*, July 6, 2020.

¹³ Aliva Tulugaq, *Atautsikut/Leaving None Behind*, 2019.