

# Survivance

30 Years of Anait Video Productions





# **Survivance**

**30 Years of Inuit  
Video Productions**

**curated by Laura McGough**

**November 12 – December 23, 2021**

**HAWAII**

# Survivance,

a portmanteau of survival and resistance, is an aesthetic theory that examines the inventive and creative practices of the Indigenous peoples of North America. "Survival" according to cultural critic Gerald Vizenor, "is a response; survivance is a standpoint, a worldview, and a presence." Survivance, as an aesthetic strategy, foregrounds the endurance of Indigenous cultures and their resistance to colonial narratives of historical powerlessness that relegate Indigenous people to an imaginary past outside of history, Western aesthetics, and technological innovation.

*Survivance: 30 Years of Arnait Video Productions* explores Arnait Video Production's (AVP) leveraging of a range of communication technologies—analogue video, digital video, Internet, computer animation, two-way radio and more—to both reconnect to lost traditions and give voice to contemporary issues of urgency to the people of the village of Igloolik and the wider Baffin Island region. In recent years, a number of Indigenous media collectives have emerged globally, including the Karrabing Film (Australia), Ojo de Augua (Mexico) and Video Republic (India) as well as the U.S.-based Cousin Collective, New Red Order and Post-Commodity, but Arnait remains unique as a woman-centered media collective that for thirty years has produced media projects that speak directly to the lives of both its Inuit and non-Inuit members.

Hallwalls' relationship with Arnait stretches back twenty-nine years. In 1992, I organized the Third Annual Video Witnesses Festival at Hallwalls. The festival, initiated by Barbara Lattanzi in 1990, and curated by Chris Hill in its second incarnation in 1992, highlighted artist/activist use of new media technologies. The bulk of the work

featured in the festival came from an open call for tapes which was accompanied a series of curated events. For the curated portion, I was interested in innovative distribution and networking projects that connected artist/activist media producers and audiences.

I had just returned to Buffalo from Toronto, where I had worked at the film co-op, LIFT, and remembered that a board member, Don Booth, had worked with Indigenous nations tribes in Canada to establish local television stations. Booth had recently heard about video work being produced in the village of Igloolik, in what was then known as the NorthWest Territories of Canada. He gave me a phone number for the newly established Tariaksuk Video Centre where I was able to reach Marie-Hélène Cousineau. The video art world was a still small network, and Marie-Hélène was familiar with both Hallwalls and the Video Witnesses Festival; her video *Women in Black* had played as part of the second festival. She told me of her work with Arnait, a newly established woman's media collective, and through the stutter and static of the satellite phone connection, a visit to the Hallwalls was conceived. Marie-Hélène and Marta Makkar, an early member of AVP, visited Buffalo in October of 1992 to present a program of video from Igloolik that included work by Arnait and Zacarias Kunuk, and as well as a selection of video from Tariaksuk's home video contest. It was Arnait's first screening outside of the Baffin Island region and Marta's first time traveling outside of Igloolik. Over the years, I've often thought back to that screening. It was a revelation to witness the emergence of a lively and energetic video scene from Igloolik. It is a pleasure to once again bring Arnait Video Productions to Buffalo.

Laura McGough, November 2021

# Formed in 1991,

Arnait Video Productions is a women's media collective based in Igloolik, an Inuit village located in Qikiqtani Region, the eastern most region of Nunavut in Arctic Canada. Arnait is the plural of arnaq which means "woman" in Inuktitut, the language of the Inuit, and the name not only reflects the collective's membership, but also their mission. Arnait produces video, narrative film, documentary, television, and internet-based projects that celebrate "the specificity of the culture of women in Igloolik" and honors their oral traditions.

The village of Igloolik is steeped in a rich media history that dates back to the mid-1970s. In 1975, and again in 1979, residents voted against accepting satellite television signals from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) because it did not offer any Inuktitut-language programming. It was only following the establishment of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) in 1982—which aired five hours per week of programming in Inuktitut via satellite—that the village finally agreed to receive a television signal. While village elders were debating the merits of indigenous programming with the CBC, Igloolik resident Paul Apak Angilirq was participating in the Inukshuk Project, a federally sponsored program established in the late-1970s that recruited and trained Inuit in six northern communities in the fundamentals of television production. Apak, along with Zach Kunuk, produced local television programming for the Igloolik-based outpost of the IBC throughout the 1980s. During this period, both men also created

independent productions including Apak's documentary *Qitdlarssuaq Expedition* (1987) and Kunuk's historical drama, *Qaggiq* (1989). Apak and Kunuk eventually left the IBC in 1990 and went on to co-found Isuma Productions with the US-born, Canadian-based director/producer Norman Cohn. Best known for *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner*, which won the Camera d'or at Cannes in 2001, Isuma also produced a 13-part dramatic television series, *Nunavut Our Land* (1995), as well as numerous documentaries. Isuma recently represented Canada at the 2019 Venice Biennale.

The Québécois video artist Marie-Hélène Cousineau arrived in Igloolik in 1990 to help establish the Tarigsuk Video Centre with Kunuk and Cohn. While at Tarigsuk, it occurred to Cousineau that the women of Igloolik might also want to learn media production. As she has noted: "I thought that maybe some of the women would want to learn how to make film, but if I just made a general call they might not come. So, I did a particular call to women. Four or five women came, and we did our first video which was called *Survey for a Woman's Video Workshop*. Recorded in 1991, *Survey for a Woman's Video Workshop* asked the women of Igloolik how video might be utilized to discuss their issues of concern. Answers ranged from preserving cultural heritage to interviews with elders who had served as village midwives. Following the video survey, *Arnait Ikajurtigiit* (a.k.a. Women's Video Workshop of Igloolik) was established by founding members Madeline Ivalu, Susan Avingaq, Martha Makkar, Mathilda Hanniliaq, and Cousineau. Over the past 30 years, a number of women have participated in the workshop, including Mary Kunuk,

Atuat Akittirq, Carol Kunnuk and Lucy Tulugarjuk. Some collective members are unilingual, speaking only Inuktitut, while others are bilingual, speaking both Inuktitut and English. Cousineau speaks both French and English. Video is the collective's lingua franca.

In their earliest works, Arnait utilized short format video to tell a range of women's stories. In *Qulliq* (1993), for example, members of Arnait reenact a traditional women's activity—the lighting of the qulliq, or the seal oil lamp—using song and words to tell its story. *Attagutalak Starvation* (1992), features village elder Rose Ukkumaluk who recounts the tale of Attagutaaluk, a woman who survived a winter starvation by resorting to cannibalism, and who went on to become an honored resident of Igloolik (both the local elementary and high schools bear her name). With *Inuit Midwives* (1991), one of Arnait's earliest projects, the collective pioneered their unique use of the interview, which draws from Inuit oral storytelling traditions.

Arnait was also an early adopter of Internet streaming technologies, producing *Live from the Tundra* over the course of five days in August 2001. Intended as a "daily journal of life in a remote outpost camp," the collective used satellite phone technology to upload video, photo, and text dispatches to the web for others to view and to which they could respond.

More recently, Arnait have turned to producing feature films and documentaries (and changed their name to

Arnait Video Productions), including the award-winning *Before Tomorrow* (2008) and the soon-to-be released *Restless River* (2019), and have served as co-producers on two television series based in the North – *The Uluit: Champions of the North* (2011) and *Sivummut: Going Forward* (2014). Despite these highly successful forays into more mainstream media production, Arnait has also embarked upon community-based cultural exchange projects in Oaxaca, Mexico and Nuuk, Greenland, extending their original mission to include the voices of indigenous people from outside of Igloolik.

Amidst all of this activity, Arnait operates an online channel on [lsuma.tv](http://lsuma.tv), a remarkable internet television portal that enables indigenous media producers to upload and distribute programming free-of-charge. Arnait's catalogue of video, film, and new media projects are now available on-demand to a worldwide audience via [lsuma.tv](http://lsuma.tv). The collective continues to be innovative in their use of technology, giving voice to Inuit women on a global scale.

Laura McGough

# Artworks in Exhibition

All work by Arnait Video Productions, unless otherwise noted)

## *Survey for a Woman's Video Workshop* (1991)

video, color, sound, 21:31 minutes

Inuktitut and English

*Survey for a Woman's Video Workshop* was the first video made by Arnait. The survey asks both elders and younger women how video might be utilized to discuss issues of concern to the women of Igloolik. *Survey for a Woman's Video Workshop* is in Inuktitut with oral translations in English.

## *Attagutaaluk Starvation* (1992)

video, color, sound, 23:24 minutes

Inuktitut with English subtitles

A true story about a woman's experience of survival through the act of cannibalism. The video features Igloolik elder Rose Uk-kumaluk who relates the tale of Attagutaaluk, a woman who survived starvation a century ago and lived to become an honored resident of Igloolik.

still from *Ataguttaaluk Starvation* (1992). Courtesy: Arnait Video Productions



***Video Correspondence: Igloolik-Montreal-Montevideo* (1992)**

Marie-Hélène Cousineau

video, color, sound 11:00 minutes

Inuktituk with English subtitles

This *Video Correspondence* project asked women from three diverse communities to exchange videos detailing their dreams. By providing a space for a multiplicity of women's voices and experiences, this project underscores the potential power of video to create communication and understanding across landscapes and languages. *Video Correspondence: Igloolik-Montreal-Montevideo* is one interpretation of the videos resulting from the correspondence. Cousineau edited this video at Hallwalls in 1992 as part of the *Open City Video Residency* project.

***Qulliq* (Oil Lamp) (1993)**

video, color, sound, 10:21 minutes

Inuktitut w/Eng subtitles

A "qulliq" is an oil lamp made of soapstone that is lit with an ivory lamp feeder. Fueled by seal or whale blubber, this multi-purpose technological tool was innovated by Inuit more than 3,000 years ago as a source for heat and light. Members of Arnait utilize the "new" technological tool of video to joyfully re-enact the ritual of qulliq or lighting of the seal oil lamp.

still from *Qulliq* (1992). Courtesy: Arnait Video Productions



***Piujug and Angutautug* (1994)**

video, computer illustrations, color, sound, 27:24 minutes.

Inuktituk with English subtitles

This video is a portrait of two women from Igloolik, Arnait co-founders Madeline Ivalu (Piujug) and Susan Avingaq (Angutautug). Piujug translates as “pretty face” and Angutautug as “strong young man.” The video contains images of both women performing traditional songs and engaging in community events in Igloolik. Computer illustrations created by artist Mary Kunuk are an integral part of the video.

***Aqtuqsi, My Nightmare* (1996)**

video, black and white, color, sound, 4:42 minutes

animation by Mary Kunuk

An “aqtuqsi” is a dream from which one must wake up. As Mary Kunuk notes, “I decided to put my aqtuqsi in video. It’s so interesting because it is not a nightmare or a regular dream: an aqtuqsi is something that can paralyze you when you’re sleeping.” Color and black and white video footage and Amiga computer animations combine with Inuit song to tell the story of the dream.

still from *Piujug and Angutautug*, (2005) collaborative direction, Susan Avingaq and Madeline Ivalu. Courtesy: Arnait Video Productions



***Unakuluk*** (Dear Little One) (2006)

Susan Avingaq, Madeline Ivalu, Mary Kunuk, Mary Qulitalik, and Marie-Hélène Cousineau  
felt mural, 64" X 96"

This handmade mural, created in conjunction with a film of the same name [not represented in exhibition], shares stories about both traditional and contemporary practices of Inuit adoption. Inuit traditionally adopted so they could have helpers: either adoptive parents helping adopted children, or vice versa. Among other stories, the blanket follows Alex, an Inuk child adopted by Arnait co-founder Marie-Hélène Cousineau.

***Show Me on the Map: Part 1*** (2010)

video color, sound, 35:00 minutes

English and Inuktitut with English subtitles

*Show Me on the Map* was recorded in 2010 as the Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation was getting ready to mine one of the largest and purest iron deposits on the planet, located approximately 300 kilometers north of the village of Igloolik at Mary River, Baffin Island. In *Show Me on the Map, Part 1: A changing world*, the residents of Igloolik react to this development expressing concerns that both the mine and its related roads and shipping routes will destroy their culture, environment, the marine mammals they depend upon, and their hunting lifestyle.

still from *Unakuluk* (*Dear Little One*) (2005) directed Marie-Hélène Cousineau in collaboration with Mary Kunuk. Courtesy: Arnait Video Productions



***Stone House*** (2011)

Susan Avingaq, Mary Qulitalik, and Rebecca Malliki  
mixed media, 23 X 18 X 4 inches

***1950s House*** (2011)

Susan Avingaq, Mary Qulitalik, and Rebecca Malliki  
mixed media, 24 1/4 X 16 X 5 1/4 inches

***Present Day House*** (2011)

Susan Avingaq, Mary Qulitalik, and Rebecca Malliki  
mixed media, 22 X 16 X 4 inches

This series of three doll houses were made by hand by members and friends of Arnait, include both created and found objects. They depict Inuit domestic life pre-contact (*Stone House*) and post-contact (*1950s House* and *Present Day House*). Highlights include the miniature qulliqs carved from soapstone and clothing sewn for the dolls.

***Igloolik 360 degrés*** (2012)

Marie-Hélène Cousineau and Etienne Boilard  
looped video projection

*Igloolik 360 degrés* provides a view of the village of Igloolik, the home of Arnait Video Productions.





stills from *Before Tomorrow* (2009) directed by Marie-Hélène Cousineau and Madeline Ivalu. Courtesy: Arnait Video Productions



still from *Tia and Piujuq* (2018) directed by Lucy Tulugarjuk. Courtesy: Arnait Video Productions



still from *Restless River* (2019) directed by Marie-Hélène Cousineau in collaboration with Madeline Ivalu. Courtesy: Arnait Video Productions



still from *Restless River* (2019) directed by Marie-Hélène Cousineau in collaboration with Madeline Ivalu. Courtesy: Arnait Video Productions



Some of the original members of Arnait Video Productions, September 2021.

Bottom row: Mathilda Hanniliaq, Madeline Ivalu, Susan Avingaq.

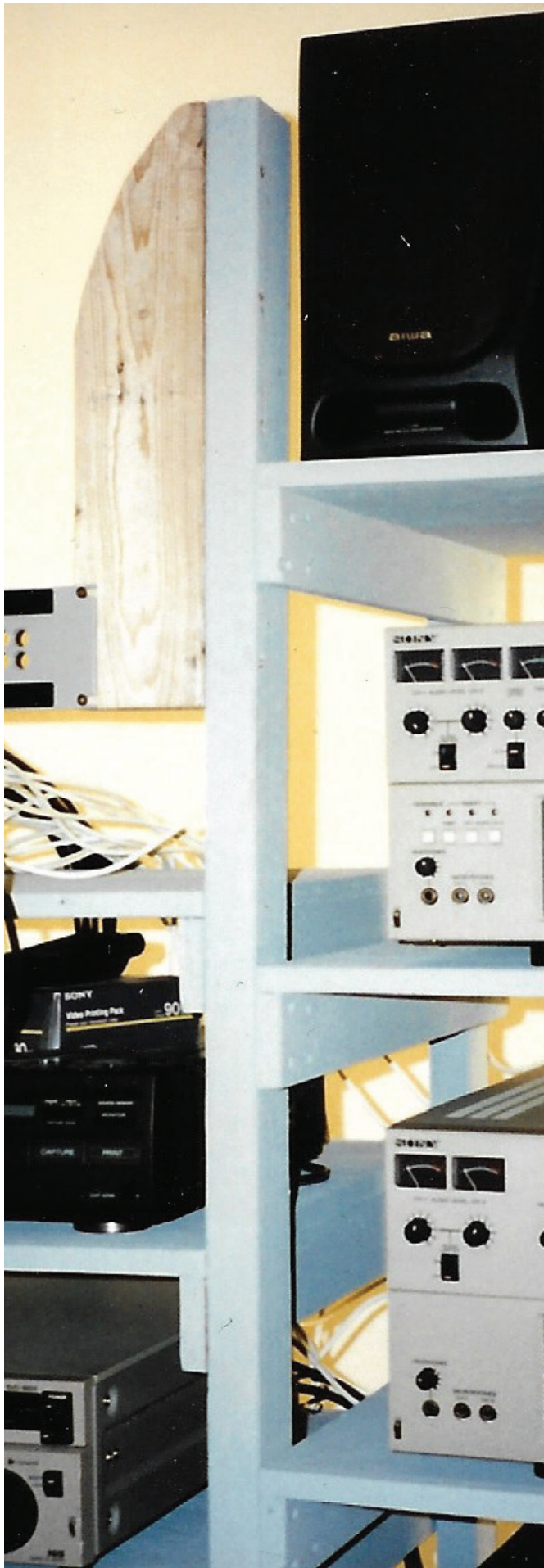
Top row: Mary Kunuk, Marie-Hélène Cousineau

# Arnait Video Productions

(originally Women's Video Workshop of Igloolik)

was founded in 1991 by Susan Avingaq, Marie-Hélène Cousineau, Mathilda Hanniliaq, Madeline Ivalu, and Martha Makkar in the village of Igloolik, Nunavut, Canada. Other women who have been involved in the collective in various ways since its inception include Atuat Akittiq, Mary Kunuk, Carol Kunnuk, and Lucy Tulugarjuk. The goal of Arnait Video Productions is to value the unique culture and voices of Inuit women and to open discussions with Canadians of all origins. Often working in precarious social conditions, the sheer endurance required on the part of the women in Arnait to produce film and video projects, testifies to the importance of the project in their lives.

Arnait Video Production's initial video projects revealed the importance for the women of Igloolik to share oral traditions. Whether in the form of interviews (*Women/Health/Body* and *Itivimiut*), oral history (*Attagutaaluk Starvation*), or as short videos linking songs to reenactment of traditional activities (*Qulliq* and *Piujuk* and *Angutautuq*), these early works celebrated the specificity of the culture of women in Igloolik. Arnait Video Productions has produced both short and long-form documentaries and narrative films. Their first feature film, *Before Tomorrow*, won Best Canadian First Feature at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2008 and was selected for the International Competition at the Sundance Film Festival. *SOL*, their latest feature documentary, won the Canadian Screen Award for Best Documentary in 2016. Between 2017 and 2019 Arnait Video produced a feature film for children, *Tia and Piujuk*, directed by Lucy Tulugarjuk and co-produced *Restless River*, a feature co-directed by Madeline Ivalu and Marie-Hélène Cousineau, and filmed in Kuujuaq, Nunavik, Canada.



The editing system at the Inarjaguk Video Centre, Igloolik, 1995 / photo: Andrew W. Deutsch

**Laura McGough** is a media art historian and curator who locates her practice at the intersection of contemporary visual and media arts. Her research as both a curator and a scholar focuses on artists' appropriation of emerging technologies and is articulated through exhibitions, screenings, essays, and digital humanities projects.

McGough has curated exhibitions, screenings and online content for arts organizations, festivals and museums in the U.S., Canada, and Europe at sites including the Art Gallery of Victoria, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, Harvard Film Archives, the Images Festival Toronto, Washington Project for the Arts/Corcoran, the Walker Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, New York University and the University of Maryland at Baltimore County.

She has received grants in support of her curatorial and research initiatives from New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the British Arts Council and the Canada Council and has served as a reader and peer review panelist for a range of federal, state and private foundations including the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, the Ford Foundation and the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities. From 2000-2003, she served as the Multidisciplinary Specialist at the National Endowment for the Arts, focusing on technology-based initiatives. McGough holds a B.A. from Chatham University, an M.A. from New York University, and a PhD from SUNY University at Buffalo.



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*30 Years of Arnait Video Productions*

**November 12 to December 23, 2021**

**Hallwalls**

**Contemporary Arts Center**

**341 Delaware Avenue**

**Buffalo, NY 12402**

**[www.hallwalls.org](http://www.hallwalls.org)**







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