



Traverse

17 Jun - 5 Jul 2019

Mark Igloliorte

Traverse: Works by Mark Igloliorte

Karl Chitham
Director, The Dowse

For **Traverse**, Canadian artist Mark Igloliorte (Inuk) brings together existing and new works that each speaks to the holistic and sometimes transient nature of being on, and living with, the natural environment in its many forms, a notion that is shared by many indigenous cultures. Igloliorte's practice touches on ideas of travel, geography and the modalities used to get from here to there. His approach, which may at times appear eclectic, incorporates painting, digital mapping, soft sculpture and moving image. However, the important link that connects these many parts is Igloliorte's Inuit heritage and how it is articulated in, and for, a contemporary world; a defining inescapable mandate that unites him with his ancestors and helps to express his understanding of place and belonging.

The title of this exhibition is an interesting proposition. While 'traverse' suggests to journey from one place to another, to cross an expanse or to navigate new or uncharted territory; the term can also signify a sense of struggle; navigating a difficult course or undertaking a precarious crossing. There are also perceptual complications with the idea of having a transient relationship with the land, a concept that from a Western vantage is often combined with being 'nomadic'. The negative connotations this suggests, such as an aimless wandering, a sense of homelessness or lack of connection with a place, does not allow for the way that many indigenous peoples enacted seasonal journeys for harvesting, hunting and fishing, and to perform ceremonies at sites that they have known and visited for generations. Indigenous customs and languages have been lost over the centuries since colonial expansion, or in some cases they have become incorporated into contemporary life, left with little or no relationship to their origins. Igloliorte makes reference to this deficit of cultural

meaning in his work titled **Eskimo Roll** (2017). This video work documents Igloliorte's attempts at performing the pre-colonial manoeuvre now popularly known as an 'eskimo roll'. It was filmed in collaboration with his wife at English Bay on the outskirts of Vancouver, British Columbia—the significance of these highly colonised place names was not lost on the artist. In the background is a large container ship and houses built up the hillside of this once pristine harbour inlet. Igloliorte paddles just offshore and through trial and error finally succeeds in completing an eskimo roll. His simple gesture to reclaim this indigenous practice, through action and documentation, talks to Igloliorte's own journey of understanding his ancestral relationships. It is also a metaphor of sorts, reflecting the exertion and the ongoing struggle of decolonisation.

Mark Igloliorte
Eskimo Roll
still from video loop
filmed and edited by
Navarana Igloliorte
2017



Language and in particular the presumptions and misconceptions of Inuktitut (the Inuit language) plays an important role in Igloliorte's work. The title **Eskimo Roll** is not only a comment on the material culture and traditions of the Inuit, but also places a pointed emphasis on the use of the word 'eskimo'. This term conjures up imagery of the stereotypical fur-clad peoples of the arctic living in igloo's and fishing through small, perfectly round holes cut into the ice. There is now some confusion about the origins of the word, but it is generally accepted that it is not a name that Inuit or other circumpolar first peoples are happy to be known by. Like many indigenous groups around the world, the Inuit, have their own names for themselves in their own language.

Even the term Inuit, which loosely translates to 'the people' is now being replaced by more localised tribal names. Igloliorte describes himself as Inuk (the singular of Inuit) and is from the Nunatsiavut Territory of Labrador on the east coast of Canada. It is on the opposite side of the country from his current base in Vancouver where he is an Assistant Professor at Emily Carr University of Art and Design, and accentuates the sense of dislocation from his cultural homeland, a concept that weaves its way through his practice. In an interview for Inuit Art Quarterly he commented on the role of the kayak in his practice and his approach to life, "I'm out here on the West Coast—it's as far as you can get from Labrador in Canada, right? It's a huge separation. So this is my idea of how I can connect with part of my culture and how I can share it with my family."¹

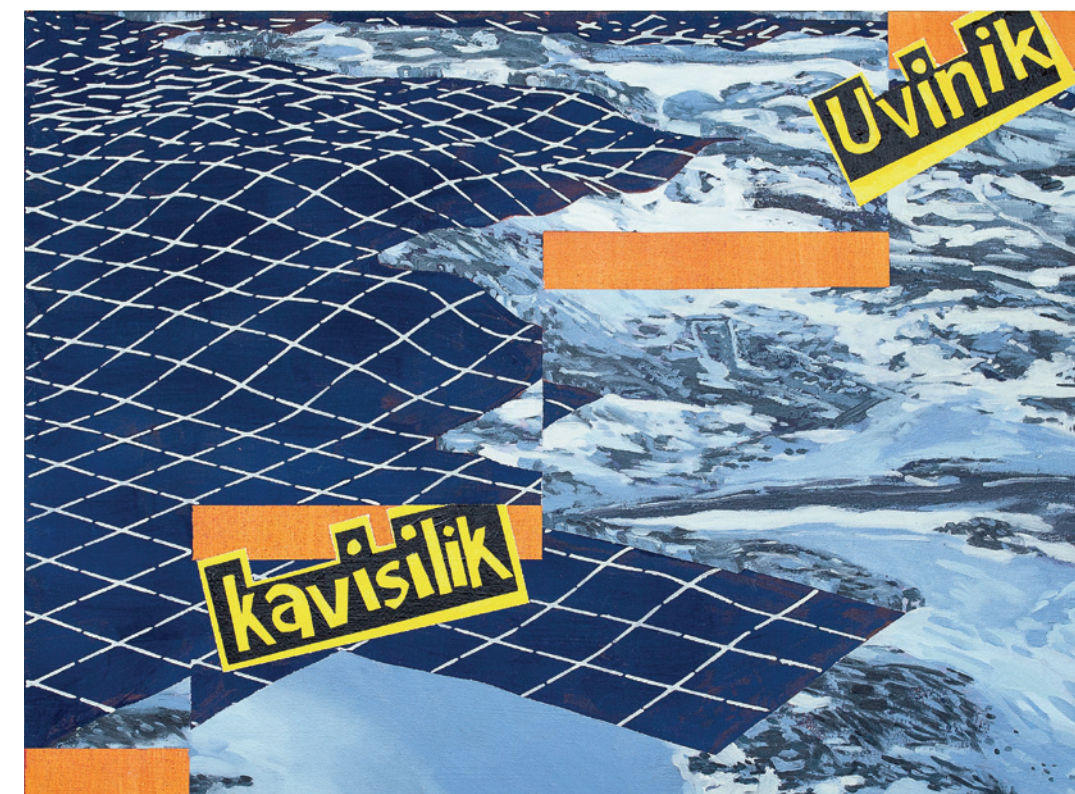
Igloliorte first began exploring his Inuit heritage in 2006 in a series of paintings he made using historical photographs taken in Labrador in the 1800s of Inuit

in their kayait (the plural of kayak, spelt kajak in Inuktitut). These paintings were a re-presentation of a time when traditional kayait production and use was disappearing, signalling a shift away from the customs and practices that had sustained the Inuit for hundreds of years. This series of paintings also began Igloliorte's fascination with the kayak as a symbol of the dichotomies of function and form, meaning and translation, as well as the constant tensions that exist between contemporary indigeneity and the impact of colonial histories. He suggests that this is a process of taking ownership of how these markers of cultural knowledge can be reframed to represent something positive that retains its authenticity.

1. Hogue, Tarah and Wilson, Jordan. "Sightlines and Surfaces: The Art of Mark Igloliorte". Inuit Art Quarterly, Fall 2016. Pg 30.



Left to right:
 Mark Iglooliorte
Pulâttik Angiggak
 oil on canvas
 2019
 Mark Iglooliorte
Kasilik SekKuk
 oil on canvas
 2019
 Mark Iglooliorte
kavisilik Uvinik
 oil on canvas
 2019



A continuation of these early paintings can be seen in **Traverse** through a collection of new works made for the exhibition. Collectively entitled **Rendering** (2019), Iglooliorte has produced a series of three paintings that bring together a number of elements he has explored in different formats in the past. Combining topographical viewpoints made from a collection of digitally altered satellite imagery with Inuktitut phrases, he explores the slippages that occur for those, like himself, that have a strong sense of belonging to the land of their ancestors, but do not always have access to their knowledge and

customs. Simple two word arrangements reflect Iglooliorte's own burgeoning journey of learning Inuktitut. Phrases he is familiar with and hears when visiting home, **Kasilik SekKuk** (Hurt Knee), **kavisilik Uvinik** (Salmon Skin) and **Pulâttik Angiggak** (Visiting Home) fill the unknown spaces in each of the landscapes, making bold statements of connection. Iglooliorte says; "These words gesture to various relationships with the land, such as hurting my knees while out on hunt or an analogy for how land ownership was written out of our land claims agreement..."



Mark Iglooliorte
**Kayak Is Inuktitut For
 Seal Hunting Boat**
 acrylic on unstretched
 canvas
 2019

Another new work called **Kayak is Inuktitut for Seal Hunting Boat** (2019), was painted onsite at Ramp Gallery during the installation of the exhibition. It continues Iglooliorte's assertion of the kayak's historical significance for the Inuit, an attempt to shift the popular perception of the kayak as a contemporary leisure craft associated with holidays and wilderness adventures, to its origins as a vessel integral to the Inuit way of life. While giving tours at the Labrador Interpretation Centre

in the small town of North West River, Iglooliorte was introduced to an early example of an Inuit kayak; "Being around an original kayak and also telling stories of how people would hunt from them, taught me to value this Inuit vehicle."²

2. Iglooliorte, Mark, Peter Morin
 "The Labrador Interpretation
 Centre", *cmagazine*, 63-64.
 Issue 136, Winter 2018



Left/front cover:
Mark Igloliorte
Seal Skin Neck Pillow
seal skin
2019

In a departure from his exploration of kayait, Igloliorte has expanded his investigation of the seal hunting tradition of the Inuit to the animal itself. Translating the idea of travel and comfort that we now enjoy through the luxury of air travel, he has sewn his own travel pillow, based on the ubiquitous accessories seen on most international flights. Igloliorte's **Seal Skin Neck Pillow** (2019), utilises the main material of his Inuit ancestors reimagined into a contemporary travel object. Making reference to the many items of necessity made from this precious resource that pre-colonial Inuit relied on for survival, this artwork also speaks to the international restrictions put in place by the 2010 European Union ban on the trade and exchange of seal products. Igloliorte, here raises the issue of cultural authority and the continuation of

cultural practices that are continually threatened by misunderstanding, ignorance and Western globalisation policies. The ban has had detrimental effects on Inuit communities, some of whom still rely on seals as a way of life, contributing to and compounding social issues.³ Used on the flight to Aotearoa, **Seal Skin Neck Pillow** subverts these international conventions, proclaiming its place to exist as both a symbol of resistance and as a taonga that embodies the hopes and expectations of the many generations that have come before.

3. This can be seen in the documentary *Angry Inuk* written and directed by Inuk film maker Alethea Arnaquq-Baril. Igloliorte cites this as a key influence in his conceptualisation of *Seal Skin Neck Pillow* (2019).

This exhibition is brought to Ramp Gallery in collaboration with The Dowse. This exhibition is co-curated by Karl Chitham (Director—The Dowse) and Wendy Richdale (Curator—Ramp Gallery).

Special thanks also to David Lloyd (long-time arts champion in Hamilton), for supporting the presentation of this exhibition.

Traverse is presented during NAISA 2019 (Native American and Indigenous Studies Association) Conference. This year is the first NAISA conference to be held outside of the US and Canada, and will be held at Waikato University from 26–29 Jun, 2019.

Install photographs by Holly Russell.

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R Block, Collingwood St
Hamilton 3204
New Zealand

rampgallery.co.nz
+64 7 834 8800 ext 3228
info@rampgallery.co.nz

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