

Artist: John Sabourin
Photo Credit: Terry Halifax



Meeting the artist and learning the story behind the carving adds to the understanding and enjoyment of a beautiful work of art from the Northwest Territories.

The largest art event is the Great Northern Arts Festival held annually in Inuvik, at the Northern end of the world-famous Dempster Highway. Visitors can drive or fly to the festival, held far above the Arctic Circle. Since 1989, each summer some 80 visual artists and 40 performers from across the North have gathered to celebrate the North's diversity. Every year there is an outdoor carvers' village where artists work on their carvings and meet with event goers. For more information about artists and workshops at this festival, visit www.gnaf.org.

The Open Sky Festival in Fort Simpson is an annual gathering of artists open to visitors, and welcomes travellers on the southern Northwest Territories highway system. In late June to early July this festival celebrates artists from the Dehcho Region, the Northwest Territories and beyond. Visit their website at www.openskyfestival.ca to confirm the Festival dates and arts activities.



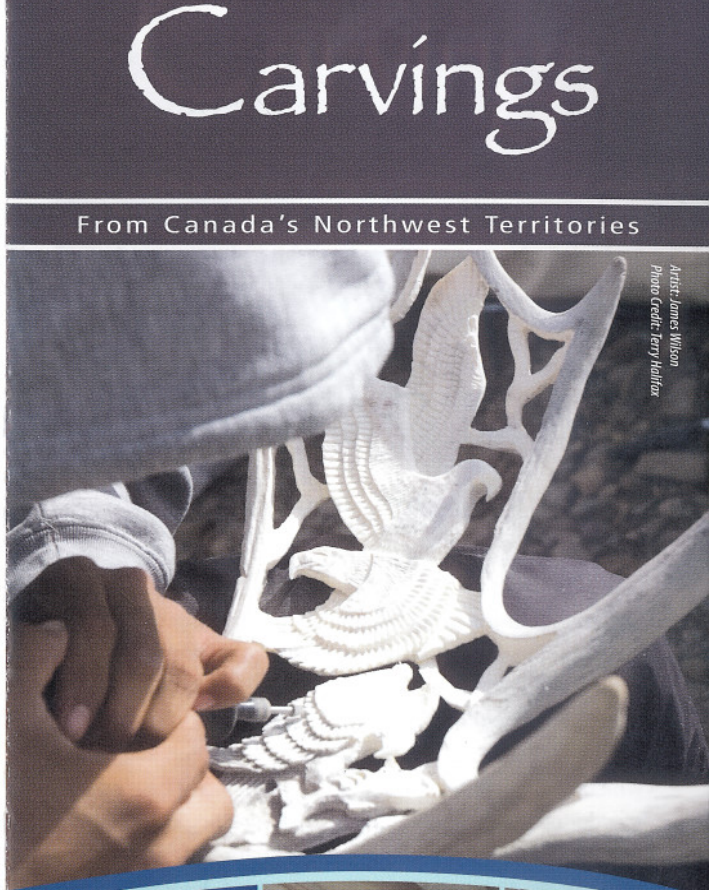
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Photo Ribbon - Artist/Photo Credit: (L-R) E. Whane/Tessa Macintosh, Acho Dene Native Crafts/Pat Kane, Crazy Legs Contemporary Dance/Jeremy Childs, Inuvik Visitors Centre/Vicki Boudreau, Derrald Taylor/Roth and Ramburg Photography, Antoine Mountain/GNWT.



Artist: James Wilson
Photo Credit: Terry Halifax

Carvings

From Canada's Northwest Territories



Trade-mark owned by the Government of the Northwest Territories



Artist: Sonny MacDonald
Photo Credit: GNWT

Taking their inspiration from ancient stories, traditional knowledge and personal experience, Inuvialuit, Dene and Métis of the Northwest Territories create dynamic, captivating carvings in a variety of media. Each carving or sculpture is one of a kind, reflecting a unique Northern heritage.

Stone and bone carvings are the highly prized iconic art from Canada's North.

Common themes and images link all Northern art. Although there are eight unique Aboriginal groups in the Northwest Territories, similar themes appear in art across these cultures. Wildlife is one common thread. Each culture has a respectful relationship with animals, which is often reflected in art - majestic polar bears and sturdy muskox from the far North; migratory water birds, graceful eagles and birds of prey, and imposing grizzly bears in southern regions. Drum dancers, hunters, and women and children are themes that permeate the art of all Northern cultures.

Carving Materials

Carvings are crafted from many different materials, often influenced by the region and the training the artist has received. Many carvers have received formal training through art workshops, colleges and southern universities.

Others have learned their craft in the traditional manner through hands-on experience, observing



Artist: Eli Nasogaluak
Photo Credit: George Fischer

family members and other artists. Carving materials come from the land - antler, bone, horn and several kinds of indigenous stone - reflecting a unique bond that Northern artists have with their environment.

Stone

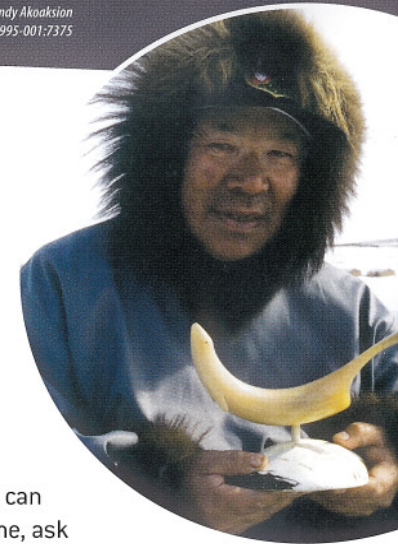
Soapstone is also called steatite, which is a soft, easily carved talc stone. In the Northwest Territories, the preferred stone is actually serpentine, a harder and more brittle material than soapstone, and also a more challenging medium. Every piece of serpentine is unique, with colours ranging from white to grey, yellow to green, and brown to black, and the stone often appears mottled or veined. Polished serpentine takes a brilliant shine, and finished carvings have a smooth, glossy surface that is pleasing to look at and touch. Northwest Territories artists also use siltstone, argillite, dolomite, and quartz, as well as imported alabaster and marble. Carving stone often has natural fissures and blemishes that add to the unique character of the piece. If you have concerns about care of your purchase, the artist or gallery owner can usually answer any questions you may have.

Antler

The Dene and Métis have long relied on moose and caribou, which form a sacred part of their cultural heritage. Northern moose and caribou shed their antlers each autumn, providing carvers with a unique and renewable carving material. Unlike stone, which can take any shape the artist chooses, antler carvers must work with the shape of the existing material. Methods for creating images with caribou or moose antler include carving with a knife or grinding tool, and etching with a hot iron. The broad tips of moose antler can reveal intricate lace-like patterns in the hands of a master carver. The antler can have a highly polished finish or a soft matte finish, depending on the visual effect the artist desires.

Bone

Bone, like antler, determines what type of carving can be created. Caribou bone can be found in its natural habitat throughout the Northwest Territories and whalebone can be collected on Arctic beaches. To ensure you can take your purchase home, ask the gallery or a local wildlife officer for information about exporting whalebone carvings. In an attempt to protect whales, the United States and some other international destinations restrict the import of whalebone, including carvings from the Northwest Territories.



Artist: Andy Akoaksion
Photo Credit: PW&S/NWT Archives/G-1995-001:7375

Muskox Horn

Along the Arctic coast, muskox horn is a renewable material available to carvers. The natural sinuous curve of the horn makes it a popular medium to create beautiful bird sculptures, such as geese with long graceful necks and black beaks. When finely polished, the horn's black tip and soft yellow and cream hues have a warm translucent glow.

Meet the Artists

Artists are accessible in the North. Several carvers open their studios to the public so visitors can meet them and watch them turn materials from the land into vibrant works of art. Summer festivals dedicated to the arts are held in several communities. Visitors can participate in workshops with famous artists, watch them at work, and trade information on techniques.