Irene Avaalaaqiaq Tiktaalaaq:
Transformative Imagination

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Abstract: The theme of transformative imagination connects the artistic process of changing materials to the larger socialcultural dynamic of change. This is acutely present in the North and what emerges from the study of Irene Avaalaaqiaq Tiktaalaaq’s life is a dynamic of expressive harmony. The wisdom found within ‘living’ landscape, cosmology, narrative, Indigenous feminism and art, illustrates a cultural transformation.

My interest in Avaalaaqiaq’s wall hangings was initiated by Renée Mxingiizhigo-kwe Bédard’s knowledge of extensive cataloguing of Avaalaaqiaq’s work. Author Judith Nasby is Director at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre in Guelph, Ontario and has established a working relationship with Avaalaaqiaq that has resulted in an extensive archive of knowledge and materials that were made available at the gallery during the summer of 2006. As a paper like this becomes an adventure of sorts and a lived experience, it was while in New York City to attend the Dada exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art that a visit to the Canadian consulate confirmed that Avaalaaqiaq’s commissioned, Helping Spirits, does indeed hang above a set of stairs.

Information is sometimes discovered by little coincidences, little harmonies of relationship as a living process. This essay embodies a narrative quality beyond books in exploring how Avaalaaqiaq’s life and art has been an ongoing exchange, her art making and persistence, essentially a first person interaction; both for present and future generations. Av Issacs (The Inuit Gallery) sold Avaalaaqiaq’s work and during an exhibit opening of Art and Cold Cash Collective this February in Toronto, Issacs departed from our conversation with memorable words of affection for the the people he has known and represented “the people of the deer are very special.”

Irene Avaalaaqiaq Tiktaalaaq makes images of transformation that originate from the rich heritage of her people. Perhaps her recorded suffering as a child and the eventual death of all her immediate family left her scarred with the trauma of loneliness, abuse and starvation. Perhaps transformation provided Avaalaaqiaq with a source of power to overcome life’s trials. Her oral traditions, her experiences, her peoples’ way of life can be seen to evolve within the theme of transformation in her appliqué wall hangings. What we can learn about this artist and her important impact on Canadian culture and on Indigenous women artists may be discovered through questioning where her imagination lives and examining the relevance of textualizing her art.

Avaalaaqiaq’s life changed abruptly and radically from living on the land to belonging to and depending on a community of settlement. Avaalaaqiaq was born in 1941, at Uluttuuaq on the north shore of Tebesjuak Lake in the Kazan River area, west of the Nunavut community of Qamanittuaq (Baker Lake). She is one of the Harvaqtormiut people, the Caribou Inuit of the Barren Grounds, and moved to Baker Lake in 1959. In 1999 the University of Guelph, which is closely associated with an extensive body of her work through the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, conferred the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa, on Avaalaaqiaq. At the convocation she addressed the graduating class.

This is a portion of her speech and an important example of her self-documentation:

I grew up at a time when Inuit did not live in communities. I was brought up on the land. It was a hard life as we lived in an igtu in the winter
caribou skin tent in the summer. My education was from my grandparents. Inuit did not write their history down like people do in the South, but we passed on our traditions, culture and values through an oral tradition. Through the oral tradition our ancestors were our teachers. I try to keep our culture alive through my art. Each wall hanging I do tells a story or legend. Art is a way to preserve our culture (Nasby, 2002:111).

It would seem that hers is a world where language takes form. Avaalaaqiaq moved from sewing with caribou sinew and skins to using brightly coloured wool materials and cotton embroidery threads. Irene Avaalaaqiaq’s work is created from an imagination still living on the land; her cosmology experience symbolizes restorative harmony in transformation and escape: oral narrative links the past to the future, forming a metaphysical bridge.

That imagination lives on the land means that imagination is a shared consciousness between the spirit of the land and the artist. Ancestral teachings about transformation creating restoration, harmony, and balance within relationships are told through stories and are represented in Avaalaaqiaq’s work. These statements require the reader to posit a cosmology of animism (from the Latin, anima, meaning vital breath, soul+ism). This contrasts with the patronizing world view of capitalistic opportunity where historic objects from a vanishing people create an economy for a people becoming extinct; thus extinction becomes a creative genre. This suggests marketing to encourage art collection.

Ultimately, authenticity and inherent purpose in Avaalaaqiaq’s originality and transformative imagination are triumphant. Avaalaaqiaq expresses an Inuit world view received through an oral tradition from her grandmother, who raised Avaalaaqiaq after her mother died. The documentation of a severe childhood indicates a lifetime of emotional struggle. Her images are “expressed in a symbolic manner that compresses time, location, narrative and the depiction of movement into timeless images conveying layers of meaning” (Nasby, 2002:4). Peter Millard writes in Baker Lake Drawings, interpreting Inuit world view as “Meta-realism,” where the Inuit “regards what is not seen as equally real and often puts it in the artwork” (1995:44). How a troublesome childhood and an imagination of the unseen become a phenomenon of Inuit beliefs can be gained through Avaalaaqiaq’s thoughts:
It is kind of scary sometimes - imagination! ... If it were possible, I wouldn’t mind turning into a bird when I get scared, and I would just fly away! I really envy the little birds, the wild little birds, who move around and look down on you from the sky (Jackson, 1995:119-20).

This relationship between an artist’s experience and the land - the place where imagination mingles the two - is a consciousness that respects the heritage of a powerful shamanic tradition. The oral tradition and traditional experience of the land, fear, and transformation provide Avaalaaqiq’s inspiration.

In Irene Avaalaaqiq: Myth and Reality, Nasby quotes Darlene Coward Wright as observing that “... in many Inuit artists’ work there is a close association of women with birds, in particular stories about women turning into birds to save themselves” (2002:60). That birds and escape become symbolic of equality places Avaalaaqiq’s work in the centre of a societal transformation: an oral event. Wright’s recent curatorial work, *Taking Flight: Shamanic Images of Birds in Inuit Art*, is an example of this “relationship [that] is significant culturally and artistically” (Wright, 2007). Shamanic flight, metaphysical union and spirit transformation exist for individual and communal survival - escape, protection, food, and healing. Avaalaaqiq’s inherited world view is reflected in respected curator Jean Blodgett’s close interpretation of the prevalent animism theme of transformation:

In addition, human, bird, and beast forms may be combined together. This merging of forms in the artworks clearly denotes the close and interdependent relationship between man and beast ... It is not always possible, nor according to Inuit necessary, to distinguish one from the other. The mutability of the artistic images, ambiguous and unclassifiable as they may seem to the western viewer, is indicative of the syncretistic vision of the Eskimo people and consistent with their view of the world around them (1978:77).

Avaalaaqiq’s cosmology then influences her elements of design and composition. Maurice Merleau-Ponty represents phenomenology in interpreting an artist’s experience of landscape and art making. Monika Langer uses Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical metaphysics in describing the state of unseen knowing, “to recapture the structure of the landscape as an emerging organism” (1978:30). The first image, to focus the argument of Irene Avaalaaqiq’s imagination living on the land, is entitled, *Imagination Visions*, c. 1980’s (Appendix 1). Avaalaaqiq’s own explanation of this work is that the head shows a person looking from side to side, the images inside the head are thoughts, and the person is thinking that something is moving on the land. She adds that

When you are out on the land alone, sometimes something like a rock or something seems to move and makes you think you see a bird or a human or something ... The thing is not really there, but you think you see it (Jackson, 2002:119).

The band of blue and the band of green entirely surrounding the double head have an interpretation, in Nasby’s biography of Avaalaaqiq, as embodying thinking in its entirety and the land in the round, an all-encompassing landscape (2002:43-44).

Norman Zepp’s investigation into more fully understanding Inuit art presents an insightful perception from Jorden Meldgaard, who writes about the symbolism of the arctic willow as the need for Northern peoples “ability to contend with the forces of nature, while at the same time yielding to them and conforming with them” (1984:20).

Avaalaaqiq has incorporated rather than assimilated new survival strategies, and these include money and art making. It is not a coincidence that the motif of the willow and the image of conforming, connect with cosmology in a way that is symbolic within Avaalaaqiq’s needlework and drawing. Survival and adaptability are represented in the drawing, *Imagination Vision*. Nasby describes the significance of the willow as twofold; firstly “the willow signature motif serves as a metaphor for her identity... reminds her of her homeland, her loving grandmother,” and secondly it represents cosmology, “where the leaves form a protective screen [wall hanging *Young Man Out Walking*, 1989] (Appendix 2) to ward off danger, and the same stitch indicates blood coursing through the young man’s veins” (2002:44). Cosmology also appears in Avaalaaqiq’s compositional design within the landscape in *Transformations*, c.1973, (Appendix 3).

Blodgett describes the theme:

Two wall hangings show her typical flowing forms and profile faces, characteristics that also appear in her drawings. In these colourful hybrid forms, legs, arms and tails turn into creatures... Of particular interest in *Transformations* (No. 11) is the insetting of the entire green area into the tan background (1983:44)

Design, cosmology, and storytelling merge into a landscape-grounding transformation as the land itself transforms. How Avaalaaqiq speaks about her imagination and the land, and how she uses oral narrative to inspire imaginative transformation, change the images that reflect a culture Avaalaaqiq had experienced as traumatic. How is harmony restored? Avaalaaqiq’s experience is imparted wisdom and an experience of traditional teaching. The work entitled, *Bird Figures*, 1998 (Appendix 4), is a story that explores the theme of selecting a wife, particular to Avaalaaqiq’s witness during her time on the land. This tradition was lost with settlement and the rise of Christian influences. The wall hanging shows both the harshness of abduction and the inequality existing between the sexes. Avaalaaqiq explains her work:

This is a story from a long time ago when severed heads of animals and humans were hung inside the iglu. In the middle of the scene is a very beautiful woman who is wearing a pink amautik. The men on either side are admiring her but she doesn’t want anything to do with them. The men said “We will turn into geese and wolves unless you marry us.” One of the severed heads hanging in the iglu said, “Look what these mean men did to us.” The woman transforms herself into a goose and is pecking the men with her sharp beak. The men quickly decide to leave her alone (Nasby, 2002:81).

Nasby describes this commentary as “a feminist spin to the traditional story of prospective husbands competing to win the hand of a bride” (2002:81) and if so, then transformation here can
be interpreted as feminist empowerment - individualism asserting independence. A careful extension of this perception may assert that the talking heads also warn future brides, and collectively the message is one of Indigenous feminism, restoring balance. What is achieved is a transformation that changes old stereotypes of defenceless women. Women can choose their husbands, and can be independent, while choosing to maintain communal bonds.

Indigenous feminism emerges as central to the argument that imagination exists on the land and that shamanic vision inspires survival on many levels. In particular, sexual freedom and equality has been achieved for Avaalaaqiaq by way of transformation. This experienced wisdom can be seen as part of the greater contribution Avaalaaqiaq makes to her people and to the outside world. How Northern peoples fit into a conformity of modernity is an introspective process best left to Northern peoples' experience. To understand the possible importance of Avaalaaqiaq's work and to appreciate oral tradition as inherent in experiencing the work, it is important to examine how the symbols of power take shape organically.

Today Christianity is the predominant religion of the North, where the prevailing economy is based on money. This demonstrates a new Northern society with new sociological structure and issues. Marie Bouchard was a guest curator for An Inuit Perspective - Baker Lake Sculpture, and as an exercise in sharing power with artists, her work in 2000 is an example of egalitarian practices. “The visual expression of the Inuit has been analyzed from many perspectives - as art or anthropology, contemporary or traditional, modernist or post-modernist - but generally, the voices of interpretation and the framework for analysis [institutional policy] have been non-Inuit [western-trained]” (Bouchard, 2000:11). The Inuit regard themselves as artists and providers utilizing both creative and life skills; this contrasts with modernists narrow and negative view interpreted by Bouchard. A western devaluing of the Inuit way. The exchanging money for creative production. “The view goes against modernist values that define art as disinterested, non-functional and universal and has made contemporary Inuit art suspect in the past,” writes Bouchard (2000:15). New survival strategies and new methods of telling stories presented new horizons for Avaalaaqiaq once in Baker Lake.

Beginning in 1969, Jack and Sheila Butler were craft officers in Baker Lake where they provided guidance and new materials in cloth and embroidery floss to Avaalaaqiaq:

The craft officers (Jack and Sheila Butler) said I should do one exactly the same but in duffle. The material seemed so big and I wondered how I was going to fill out all the empty space. I was thrilled that I was requested to make one. I just put only a few items on it. I was asked what are those images. I replied, “They are stories that my grandmother used to tell me in the evening. I did them from memory.” (Nasby, 2002:33)

Bouchard and the Butlers recognize the import economic relationship between the Inuit and southern markets. Baker Lake artists are unapologetic for this relationship:

Many conceded during their interview, that the need to earn money to be self-supporting had provided both the motivation and the inspiration...[carvers] make no apology for the role economics plays in their visual production and see it as an integral and necessary function of the aesthetic act (2000:15).

This is where we find another of Avaalaaqiaq's impact on Canadian culture and on Indigenous women artists. In her popular wall hangings, her traditional stories, and her financial independence, past and present are intertwined and narrated through symbols of transformation to provide an example of equality. In New York City, outside the Canadian consulate hangs Avaalaaqiaq's Helping Spirits, 1997 (Appendix 5), representing Canadian art and culture to impress upon citizens from around the world the significance of her achievements. It also represents a separation between two worlds of meaning - two different imaginations and the two different lands of understanding.

Avaalaaqiaq was one of the last Harvaqtornermiut to live on the land. Avaalaaqiaq's symbolism also represents the Eurocentric and Northern divide. Over four hundred years ago Prohiser sailed north, seeking passage to the Orient, and the subsequent amount of writing and interpretation of the North has been immense. One writer who seeks to transcend the imagination found living on the land is John Moss. In his prose and his poetry, he narrates a journey of consciousness that climaxes in his chapter, “Ultima Thule and the Metaphysics of Arctic Landscape.” As an example of experimental writing, Moss's Enduring Dreams exposes imagination as living on the land when he writes, “In Arctic landscape there is no other world that is not also ours; anything can be imagined” (1996:125).

Beginning in the 1950's, the tragic starvation of the Inuit prompted the relocation of the traditionally nomadic Inuit peoples to centralized communities, including Avaalaaqiaq, to Baker Lake. Contemporary writer Kristin Potter’s article, James Houston, Armchair Tourism, and the Marketing of Inuit Art, addresses imposed modeling with suspect conclusions. Referring to James Houston’s intent in his promotional writings about the Inuit and their art, Potter states as her thesis:

In this essay my analysis of Houston's writings will reveal not only that he was keenly aware of the interest in primitive art at the mid century but will also show how he adopted and adapted preconceptions about primitive peoples at the time in order to access the greater non-Western art market (1999:41).

James Houston worked to promote Inuit creative production, thus creating a cash economy for a people ravished by recent starvation and the collapse of fur trade revenue.

Who could fault any effort to help people in need by establishing economic independence for them? Houston was standing astride a line of ambiguity between Northern survival and intellectualized preconceptions about the other. On paper, Avaalaaqiaq's imagination is separated from the experience of the land. Another separation is the experience of earning a living. The
modernists had a disdain for money and an inauthentic mass culture. The artist Jean-Paul Riopelle knew modern motivation to be its own distain: “It’s money. Always money. And again money. In the modern world, all success is based on money, and nothing else” (Érouart, 1995:31). Earlier the suggestion of extinction as a creative genre for collectors is supported by Potter:

While fabricating and exploiting this transitory state between ‘primitive’ and modern, Houston did not seek to imply that the Inuit will remain there indefinitely. Rather he cleverly suggested that there was very little time to act, boldly linking printmaking to the gradual disappearance of the Inuit religion (1999:51-52).

Potter points out Houston’s reference to shamanism as providing the inspiration for more than half of the prints produced at the time, while attributing the presence of Christianity and standardized education as contributing factors to the “death of this ancient religion” (1999:52). Houston’s crafted ambiguity primed an audience eager to collect primitive representations of a primitive religion soon to become extinct.

Such evidence perhaps devalues the authenticity of an imagination living on the land and possibly goes as far as to suggest a disingenuous business arrangement. However, further commentary on the economy of the Inuit provides examples of a consistent effort to preserve Northern artistic sensibilities, including James Houston’s efforts. The Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources published a booklet in 1955 with design and layout by Houston. An important commentary on the direction of the early work in promoting Inuit art through the Canadian Handicrafts Guild and the Hudson’s Bay Company reads as follows:

Out of the lifeless rocks they [Inuit carvers] wrested imaginative and lively forms, depicting not only human beings and animals but also imagined creatures seen only in their dreams.... this primitive art persists, original, creative and virile (Houston, 1952:7).

Some of Potter’s information from Houston can be traced to, In Search of Contemporary Eskimo Art. "Perhaps the Eskimo hunter still attaches magical significance to the little models of the game he hopes to kill” (1999:47 / 1952:37). Repetition of Houston’s coined phrases confirms a constructed interpretation. Houston’s last paragraph attempts to counter a less than desirable anti-modernist practice:

The art of the Eskimo is personal, created for the artist’s satisfaction, not just for commercial ends. So it must remain... But to the Eskimo the carving will remain a simple thing (1952:38).

In agreement with Potter, just as a constructive persona emerges from marketing, the act of writing emerges as an influential guide to perpetuate stereotypical identities for the Inuit. However, while all this writing shapes outside interpretation, the lives of artists like Avaalaaqiq continue oblivious to it, and her symbolism continues experiencing an oral dialogue with the land. In Joan Vastokas’s Beyond the Artifact: Native Art Performance, Vastokas laments the separation of Indigenous culture [art] to the anthropology of the Museum of Civilization. Further to the classification of Indigenous art, Vastokas states the modality of persistent ideology: “Western perception of Native art has been influenced from the beginning by the Renaissance and Modernist perceptions of art work as an isolated object, as commodity and as status symbol” (1992:16). Vastokas employs John Dewey’s interpretation of “complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events” when she describes, “Art for Dewey is experience and act” (1992:17). Her 1990 lecture and conceptualization of a relationship between people, culture, and landscape sought to reorder assumptions about a metaphysical connection. Vastokas explains how "these intangibles, then, have to do with the art work in relation to the bodily self, to the socialcultural context, and to the natural environment.” (1992:33) These intangibles and the integral process of a “living reality” (1992:34) of nature’s creative context is one of porous consciousness; one that Vastokas understands as a performance of expression and connective-ness to the cosmos. Emerging from this communication phenomenon are artistic image metaphors and as Vastokas suggests, an “elevated purpose” of “meaningful harmony” (1992:43) becomes the dynamic relationship between ourselves, nature and landscape. Vastokas’s argument is important to the validity and an unseen reality in Avaalaaqiq’s work. Dewey confirms the imposed rationale of intelligentsia: “Art in any culture is not an artifact. Above all, art is not like language, not a ‘text’” (1992:17). Perhaps this is the way writing imposes itself on Avaalaaqiq’s work and all artists’ work by outside interpretation. Remembering that the images of transformation speak oral narrative, what follows bridges land and time, past and present, transformation and escape, and restoration and harmony.

Berlo and Phillips in Oxford History of Art: Native North American Art suggest Southern audiences desire art by the other, the product of “primordial and unspoiled” people (1998:168). This may be a fictitious need strong enough that nostalgic tendencies create the persona/genre. However, economy has benefits. Berlo and Phillips concede that Eurocentric and male-dominated models have eroded women’s status and economic position (1998:169), yet this is not the last word. Yes, Berlo and Phillips point to Inuit artistic genius and art market as having combined to create economic self-determination for men, however, women have also claimed their self-worth and pride. Nasby comments on the issue from first-hand interviews with Avaalaaqiq:

Art is viewed as a vehicle for personal expression, a means to supplement income and provide for one’s family, and as an important source of self-esteem... strong commitment to use the vehicle of art to pass on to her [Avalaanaaq] grandchildren the stories and culture of her youth that were passed on to her by her grandmother (2002:72).

Transformative imagery is both an economic and a symbolic sign of empowerment. To understand the significance of this symbolic imagery, Katharine Fernstrom’s article, The Inuit: Lives of Adaptation in the catalogue, Northern Lights: Inuit Textile Art From The Canadian North, finds insight from Blodgett:

Artworks showing shaman, dog sleds, or igloos are more popular than those of Christ, snowmobiles or prefabricated houses. Whether as a result of saleability or the artist’s personal preference, shamanistic and mythological subjects far

Of the twelve artists included in the exhibit, including Avaalaaqiaq, all use shamanistic images to one degree or another.

The symbolic language of transformation focused in Fernstrom's article recognizes Avaalaaqiaq's purpose for making the work. Fernstrom refers to Avaalaaqiaq in her concluding statement, echoing Nasby's earlier commentary on Avaalaaqiaq's intent:

Irene Avaalaaqiaq hopes that one of her children or grandchildren will follow her in the arts. Indeed, she expresses the hope that her wall hangings and the stories they tell might become the source of family and cultural history for her grandchildren, just as her grandmother's stories became the narrative content of her own wall hangings. If and when that happens, the wall hangings, which began as an experiment in self-expression and economic development directed to a non-Inuit audience, will have come full circle, linking Inuit of generations past, present, and future to their heritage (1994:14).

Whether by accident or design, the end result is the preservation of culture and a new oral tradition that communicates to all languages and cultures an imagination living on the land: shamanism, healing, restorative harmony, and teaching of balance, all seen in Avaalaaqiaq's compositional style of symmetric appliqué elements. Genders are universal in their ability to transform. *Husband and Wife*, 1999 (Appendix 6), features all the elements of transformation and oral tradition. The playful transformation of spouses, sky border and helpful ravens are symbolic of animism union and the experience of shamanism.

The transformations of animism are all part of a complex organization that communicates an important oral tradition. The shaman philosophy, as told to Knud Rasmussen on his Fifth Thule expedition by Shaman Igjugarjuk, underscores the conditions that nurture a sensitivity to shamanic revelations, "...how true wisdom can only be attained through sufferings in solitude of almost sublime simplicity" (Nasby, 2002:19). The trauma Avaalaaqiaq endured in her youth has transformed itself into wisdom as an elder. Her appliqué has its roots in skin designs for garments. The use of a negative ground as an important aspect of design composition relates in theory back to Thule culture and has been used extensively in contemporary printmaking (Vastokas, 1971-72:73). Nasby describes Avaalaaqiaq's style of work as quick and does not apologize for any lack of proficiency; on the contrary, she attributes the free-flowing style to an opening up of creative possibilities (2002:46).

Avaalaaqiaq has described, through an interpreter, the fashion of her creative process in 1973 to Globe and Mail reporter, James Lewcum: "... she no longer uses pencil and paper on which to first design her motifs. She lets the scissors tell their story directly on the pieces of felt." The scissors, felt, and stitches have the power to transform, and Avaalaaqiaq's experiences synchronize this act of memory and design. The use of stitching to describe detail - movement through pattern, and the symbolic powers in design (willow stitch), may be only a sampling of what boundaries scissors and needle expand upon. The modernist who conceives of a world of neo-mythology, cosmic union, objects and spirits, would accept that scissors and imagination dream into reality. This may be Joseph Campbell's shared vision: "it then occurred to me that outer space is within inasmuch as the laws of space are within us; outer and inner space are the same" (2002:2). Campbell considers Copernicus's impact on the modern deconstruction of the earth at the centre of

God's universe... the recognized idea of the earth in relation to outer space became forever separated from the daily experience of the same. An intellectual concept had refuted and displaced the nevertheless persistent sensory precept (2002:17).

Again, the divide between animism of all things and categories of substance, persists.

André Breton was a poet and art critic/theorist within the modernist movement. One of Breton's contemporaries, Riopelle (also infamous and famous as a signatory of the manifestos *Ruptures inaugurales* and REFUL GLOBAL), described Breton's trip to Quebec, complete with Breton's resulting Paris apartment collection of Indian and Inuit masks, as making a "big impression" (Érouart, 1995:12). As suggested earlier, the imagination living on the land that inspires Avaalaaqiaq is the imagination that modernists during the early 20th century sought as a hope for the reconstruction of society. Margaret Dubin discusses the notion of a divided intelligence, where the stereotype for Indigenous peoples is perpetual: "... memberships in formerly 'primitive' cultures, in particular, are expected to perpetuate their own historical forms" (1999:158). Perhaps an equal stereotype is that the intelligent modernist interpretation evolves with Western artists (Gaughan or Picasso). The collectable African statue that Matisse is said to have shown Picasso in Gertrude Stein's apartment in Paris (Meldrum, "Stealing beauty"), demonstrates Indigenous culture for inspired cultural creativity (Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907); appropriation allows for a great deal of license by cubists and modernists. However, the modernists were unable to merge the outer and the inner worlds to create revolution.

Could a world transformed by the splitting of atoms suspend disbelief in Northern cosmology where man can transform into woman and vice versa, animals and rocks into humans? Could it believe in a societal transformation of harmony between the sexes? Avaalaaqiaq's work entitled, *Fighting Women*, 2004 (Appendix 7), can be seen as a departure from the fearful child of the past. In this work the border is gone, and the landscape has given way to real, transforming and empowered female spirits that are attacking the threatening, ambiguous, yet meek, spirit in the centre. Imagination has been transformed.

Irene Avaalaaqiaq's work is created from an imagination still living on the land. The possible learning that could come from looking and listening to the stories of her wall hangings is a healing and education of community accessible to all cultures. The impact of Avaalaaqiaq's work cannot be underestimated, offering the preservation of historical tradition, to be sure, as well as raising questions regarding a potential full circle of future image-making, as speculated by Fernstrom. How the imagination living on the land will influence future stories may be dependent on the changes occurring on the land. Because the equality between the sexes, has, and probably always will be a struggle, the flight and fight of women may provide the transformational images for the sudden change of ecology in the North and evolving global issues. The vision of shamanic transformation has matured beyond the escape of a fearful child or husband and wife from the changing spirits on the land: "If I am afraid, I can turn into a wolf and quickly run away. If the wolf's speed is insufficient, I can turn into a bird and fly far..."

Irene Avaalaaqiaq Tiktaalaq’s scissors, needle, and cloth provide the possible answers to her importance in Canadian culture and to Indigenous women artists. Her stories have communicated an oral tradition in appliqué that has transformed a cosmology of time and language from her ancestors’ teachings. The harmony of transformative imagination is the authentic and inherent purpose in Avaalaaqiaq’s originality that preserves the Harvaqtormiut culture. It is a significant teaching for anyone willing to accept creativity as survival and beauty - imagination living on the land.

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**Resources**

[http://www.aicn-inac.gc.ca/art/inuit/conta_e.html](http://www.aicn-inac.gc.ca/art/inuit/conta_e.html)
[http://carlton.ca/gallery/creative/Bios.html](http://carlton.ca/gallery/creative/Bios.html)
APPENDIX 1

PLATE 10

*Imagination Vision*, c. 1980’s
coloured pencil on paper
56 cm x 42 cm


Sketch by: William Boyd Fraser
APPENDIX 2

PLATE 1

*Young Man Out Walking*, 1989

wool duffle and felt, cotton embroidery thread

75 cm x 97.8 cm cm


Sketch by: william boyd fraser
APPENDIX 3

NO. 11

Transformations, c. 1973
felt, embroidery floss and thread
82 cm x 128.5 cm

APPENDIX 4
PLATE 28

Bird Figures, 1998

wool duffle and felt, cotton embroidery thread
99 cm x 148.6 cm


Sketch by: william boyd fraser
APPENDIX 5

PLATE 27
Helping Spirits, 1997
wool duffle, stroud, and felt, cotton embroidery thread
289.75 cm x 228.75 cm

Commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
for the Canadian consulate, New York

APPENDIX 6

PLATE 11

Husband and Wife, 1999

wool duffle and felt, cotton embroidery thread

153.5 cm x 172.75 cm

APPENDIX 7
Drawing done at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, 2006
*Fighting Women*, 2004
wool duffle and felt, cotton embroidery thread

size and colours not documented