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Inuk Artist Shuvinai Ashoona Receives the Prestigious Governor's General Award

Ashoona has been recognized for her impact and exceptional achievements in Inuit art.

Lauren Edwards – March 08, 2024



Photo by Byron Dauncey

Since starting to create art after encouragement from her sister over twenty years ago, **Shuvinai Ashoona** has received many accolades for her expressive body of work, including being elected into the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 2013. Ashoona has been awarded as one of eight recipients of the prestigious Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts.

Hailing from Kingait (also known as Cape Dorset), Nunavut, Ashoona's colourful, otherworldly creations speak to Inuit culture through a contemporary lens, seamlessly blending historical and

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present-day elements through drawings. A few works are self-portraits, while many are detailed fantastical landscapes peppered with human figures with animalistic features.



Shuinai Ashoona: An Exhibition and Celebration, Marion Scott Gallery, installation view



Shuinai Ashoona, untitled (shoes), permanent marker and Adidas sneakers, women's size 7

Ashoona's work has been exhibited across the country and in the US in an expansive list of distinguished galleries and recently jumped to international waters. In 2022, her drawings received a special mention at the Venice Biennale. The notable work is currently on display in the United Kingdom titled: ***Shuinai Ashoona: When I Draw.***

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She says winning the award is “unbelievable” and expresses joy of the achievement, saying she would love to create a lot more art. “I don’t even think about getting awards for making my art,” she says. ‘I’m just happy when people can see my drawings in galleries and museums and books. I think this award means that many, many people are getting to see my artworks.”

Ashoona is the third generation in her family’s lineage recognized for Inuit art—her father Kiugak Ashoona, and grandmother Pitseolak Ashoona, are the most celebrated Kinngait artists of their respective generations. A member of the **West Baffin Cooperative**, Ashoona works in the studio and offers mentorship to many young creatives there.



Left: Shuvinai Ashoona, *Tangled Up*, 2023, etching and hand-colouring, variable edition, 10/10 Right: Shuvinai Ashoona, *Going Around the World*, 2023, etching and hand-colouring, variable edition, 10/10

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Shuvinai Ashoona, untitled (hanging pyramid), 2024, monotype on paper mounted on acid-free foam core

“Shuvinai Ashoona is one of Canada’s most influential visual artists and has fast become an internationally important creator,” said West Baffin Cooperative President Pauloosie Kowmageak. “Ashoona has achieved remarkable success and recognition for her art practice and the community of Kingait; I can’t imagine a more deserving recipient of this prestigious award.”

Robert Kardosh, the owner of Marion Scott Gallery in Vancouver, nominated Ashoona for the Governor General’s Award. Kardosh met Shuvinai’s father when he was young, and his mother was the then art gallery owner showcasing his work. Kardosh is the third-generation owner of the gallery and says Ashoona’s artwork makes connections and bridges cultures. “Her images tell us something important about ourselves and the world we all share. This award acknowledges and celebrates that deep resonance. It’s also a testament to her tenacious dedication to her vision and community.”