



National  
Gallery  
of Canada  
—  
Musée  
des beaux-arts  
du Canada



La Biennale di Venezia

58. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

## Isuma represents Canada at the Biennale Arte 2019

“In today’s contentious global media environment, when millions of people have been driven from their homes worldwide, Isuma media art in the UN Year of Indigenous Languages sees the forced relocation of families from an Inuit point of view. The video installation *One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk* recreates an encounter on Baffin Island in April 1961 when one Inuit family was ordered to move off the land. From the same place, 58 years later, Isuma webcasts *Silakut Live from the Floe Edge* as a multinational mining company plans a railroad and supertanker shipping past today’s Inuit communities of Igloodik and Pond Inlet. Our name Isuma means 'to think,' a state of thoughtfulness, intelligence or an idea. Isuma illuminates the consequences of Canada's relocation of Inuit in the 1950s and 60s in order to reclaim history today and imagine a different future.”

—Isuma

**OTTAWA, May 8, 2019** – The National Gallery of Canada is proud to present an exhibition by the artist collective Isuma at the Biennale Arte 2019. It is the first presentation of art by Inuit in the Canada Pavilion and the first exhibition since the building underwent a \$3-million CAD restoration in 2017–2018. Isuma’s exhibition in Venice coincides with the United Nations’ [International Year of Indigenous Languages](#), offering an unprecedented opportunity to share Inuit-language creative production on a global stage.

Isuma, the artist collective led by **Zacharias Kunuk** and **Norman Cohn**, presents a three-part project consisting of: *One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk*, a video installation of Isuma’s latest dramatic film; *Isuma Online*, a collection of Inuit and other Indigenous-language films available on iTunes and IsumaTV with an online exhibition catalogue at [www.isuma.tv](http://www.isuma.tv); and *Silakut Live from the Floe Edge*, a series of live webcasts from the land around Baffin Island.

“Isuma reminds us that the power of the human imagination to share the lived experience is limitless,” said **Dr. Sasha Suda**, Director and CEO of the National Gallery of Canada. “It is fitting that Isuma share its work on the world stage at the Biennale Arte 2019 where an international audience is invited to critically engage with a practice that mines the intersections between Inuit contemporary life and settler traditions, between modern society and colonial institutions.”

Isuma selected five curators to organize its presentation in Venice. They are **Asinnajaq**, artist, writer and curator from Inukjuak, Nunavik; **Catherine Crowston**, Executive Director and Chief Curator of the Art Gallery of Alberta; **Barbara Fischer**, Executive Director and Chief Curator of the Art Museum at the University of Toronto; **Candice Hopkins**, Senior Curator of the Toronto Biennial of Art; and **Josée Drouin-Brisebois**, Senior Curator of Contemporary Art, National Gallery of Canada.

In a joint statement, the curators said: “Working against persistent historic trauma, Isuma's practice recovers and sustains stories, language and traditions. Isuma creates contemporary forms of gathering places, through television broadcast, the internet, documentaries and fiction films. Our work as a curatorial team is guided by the collective’s values. We are inspired by the ways in which Isuma’s media activism forges networks among Indigenous peoples and beyond, thoughtfully mobilizing new communities of resistance. The artists’ presentation in Venice offers models of radical inclusivity and digital democracy. We feel that these media works link the social, cultural and political effects of dislocation and are particularly resonant in our present moment—a time that affords great mobility to a privileged few and forced dislocation for many.”

The Isuma project was commissioned by the [National Gallery of Canada](#) and presented in partnership with the [Canada Council for the Arts](#). The Canadian representation at Biennale Arte 2019 is made possible through the *Canadian Artists in Venice Endowment* at the [National Gallery of Canada Foundation](#) and with the generous financial support of Presenting Sponsor [Royal Bank of Canada \(RBC\)](#), Canada Council for the Arts, [Government of Canada](#), and numerous private contributions.

### ***One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk***

*4K digital video installation, 112 minutes, Inuktitut-English 2019*

In April 1961, John Kennedy is America's new President, the Cold War heats up in Berlin and nuclear bombers are deployed from bases in arctic Canada. In Kapuivik, north Baffin Island, Noah Piugattuk's nomadic Inuit band live and hunt by dog team as his ancestors did when he was born in 1900. When the white man known as Boss arrives at Piugattuk's hunting camp, what appears as a chance meeting soon opens up the prospect of momentous change. Boss is an agent of the government, assigned to get Piugattuk to move his band to settlement housing and send his children to school so they can get jobs and make money. But Kapuivik is Piugattuk's homeland. He takes no part in the Canadian experience; and cannot imagine what his children would do with money.

### ***Isuma Online*** [www.isuma.tv](http://www.isuma.tv)

Isuma's exhibition in cyberspace presents a collection of Isuma and other Indigenous-language films on iTunes in 30 countries with subtitles in English, Italian, French, Spanish and German. *Isuma Online* features *Silakut Live from the Floe Edge* webcasts, the complete archive of Igloolik's Inuktitut video production since 1985, and more than 7,000 international Indigenous films and videos in 75 languages. IsumaTV's network of local servers in remote Inuit communities makes the exhibition available in regions where high-cost and low-bandwidth prevent fair access to internet media. *Isuma Online* also offers a free exhibition catalogue with critical essays, scripts, background information, behind-the-scenes photographs and links to all films.

### ***Silakut Live from the Floe Edge***

Fifty-eight years after Boss ordered Piugattuk off his homeland into government settlement, a mining company proposes a railroad across Baffin Island to ship 30 million tons of iron ore annually by supertanker through walrus breeding grounds within view of Piugattuk's former home site at Kapuivik. Isuma will webcast *Silakut Live from the Floe Edge* from May 8–11, 2019, consulting Igloolik hunting families on the impact and benefits of the iron mine's proposed expansion. From September 16–21, Isuma will webcast *Silakut Live* from Pond Inlet, where public hearings will review the mining company's Environmental Impact Statement. *Silakut Live* brings global media transparency to the consequences of forced relocation to viewers in Nunavut, Venice, Canada and worldwide. A schedule of *Silakut Live* webcasts online and transmitted to select theatres in Venice, Canada and other participating locations can be found at [www.isuma.tv/live](http://www.isuma.tv/live).

For more information about Isuma, the artists and film screenings, please visit [isuma.tv](http://isuma.tv). Follow [#canadapavilion2019](#) [#canadainvenice2019](#) [#IsumainVenice](#) [#Isuma](#) for updates.

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