



Birds were Frightened by the Eyes in the Potatoes, Irene Avaalaqiaq, Baker Lake, 1981. Stencil on paper. On loan, Robert and Judith Toll Collection.

Power of Flight: Visions of Birds in Inuit Art



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Birds play important roles in many aspects of Inuit culture. They are harbingers of spring, sources of food and clothing, and significant characters in myths and legends. They have a spiritual dimension as well. Their ability to

move through air, and often water, makes them especially valuable as helpers to shamans as they fly on visits to the spirit world. Inuit artists represent birds in all these guises – as beautiful and graceful creatures, as characters in familiar stories, and as powerful and even dangerous spirits.



Little Circle, Jessie Oonark and Nancy Kangeryuaq Sevoga, Baker Lake, 1974. Stencil on paper. On loan, Robert and Judith Toll Collection.



The Power of Flying, Myra Kukiiyaut and Martha Ilumigayak Noah, Baker Lake, 1984. Stencil on paper. On loan, Robert and Judith Toll Collection.



Shaman Bird Transformation, Aisa Tuluga, Puvirnituq, before 1970. Soapstone. On loan, Robert and Judith Toll Collection.



The Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum and Arctic Studies Center
9500 College Station, Brunswick, Maine 04011

Museum Hours
Tuesday-Saturday
10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
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Birds in Nature and the Nature of Birds

Alaskan carvers, such as Ted Mayac, Jr., represent many different species of birds with remarkable realism. Note the detail in Mayac's horned grebe with a chick on its back. A few Alaskan carvers break away from the strict realism of their colleagues, most famously Justin Tiulana, who carved this distinctive ring of swans. Canadian Inuit artists often work with simple forms that capture the essence of a bird, such as the quizzical tilt of this small bird's head.

Bird with Ringed Neck, Suzanne Tupitnerk Mablik, Repulse Bay, 1968. Soapstone. On loan, Robert and Judith Toll Collection.



Horned Grebe with Chick, Ted Mayac, Jr., Anchorage, March 14, 2005. Ivory and pigment. Museum purchase.



Swan Ring, Justin Tiulana, King Island, ca. 1987. Ivory. Museum purchase.

Bird Women

Activities of birds and women are often linked in Inuit tales, and Inuit artists often depict that close association.

Bird and Bird Women by Ananaisie Alikatuktuk includes bird women with human faces, who are clearly part of the bird world, placidly perched on a piece of antler. *Bird Woman*, by Therese, seems quite content being part of both worlds with her human face and posture, and bird body.



Bird Woman, Therese, Igloolik, 1968. Serpentine. Robert and Judith Toll Collection.



Bird and Bird Women, Ananaisie Alikatuktuk, Pangnirtung, 1983. Soapstone and antler. On loan, Robert and Judith Toll Collection.

Transformation

As shamans prepare to travel to the spirit world they transform themselves, taking on some or all of the characteristics of their spirit helpers. Inuit artists envision this transformation in many ways. Billy Gauthier's *Shaman Transformation* vividly portrays a shaman ready to take flight. Half man, half owl, he only needs to step out of his other boot to complete the transformation process. George Arlook's *Bird Transformation* goes to the other extreme, presenting a very abstracted vision of the change in form.



Shaman Transformation, Billy Gauthier, Northwest River, 2006. Alabaster, serpentine and sandstone. Museum purchase.



Bird Transformation, George Arluk, Rankin Inlet, 1983. Soapstone. On loan, Robert and Judith Toll Collection.