

INUIT SCULPTURE

SCULPTURE OF THE ESKIMO. Swinton, George. 1987. Toronto, McClelland and Stewart. 255p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-7710-8372-6. Can \$24.95.

Inuit art is a rapidly developing, innovative phenomenon. That a book on Inuit sculpture first published in 1972 should now be reprinted in paperback attests to its value as more than a catalogue of recent fine works. This book endures because it draws the untutored enthusiast into the world of the artist, exposing the reader to the traditions, concepts, and motivation of Inuit sculpture through a well-considered progression of text and photographs.

The book starts with a poem and a short series of photographs, an introduction of illustrated text, and a 'museum without walls'—a lengthy photo-essay that explores the great variety of Inuit sculpture. Then comes the main illustrated text, in ten brief chapters that outline the ecological and cultural environment of Inuit art and its development through prehistoric and historic periods up to the present day (1972). The author tackles the difficult topic of contemporary sculpture since its flowering in the early 1950s, and its place within the world of art. The final section, occupying roughly half the volume, is a photo-catalogue of the work of major artists, organised by area and containing photographs of over 600 carvings.

The brief text provides a valuable interpretative framework for the wealth of visual material, and is the author's platform for presenting his view of art as a cultural expression. It is thus an anthropological work in itself, a well-researched argument that secular sculpture was established in the Arctic over 1000 years ago, continued unbroken through the contact and historic periods, and is currently an art form of great cultural significance to the Inuit. Related to this view is an emphasis upon acceptance of the artist's concepts. In arguing that we accept Inuit concepts of what is successful art, the author strives for recognition of the successes of individual artists. The message of this book, then, is that Inuit sculpture is not a homogeneous body of charming, primitive souvenirs, but work of great individuality and integrity. It reminds us in turn that the people too are individuals; on these grounds alone the book was well worth reprinting.

Sculpture of the Eskimo is a large-format book, thoughtfully laid out. In the catalogue, picture captions appear at the top of each page in the same arrangement as the plates; in the text, plates are almost always on the page containing the reference to them. Quality of the plates is surprisingly high, considering that there are over 800 photographs from twenty different sources. Almost all are black-and-white, and the quality of reproduction equals of the original publication. There is a wide-ranging bibliography current to 1972, and, true to the author's aims, an index of artists. (Karen Digby-Savelle, Harston House, Harston, Cambridge.)

NO POLAR INSTITUTE FOR CANADA?

CANADA AND POLAR SCIENCE. Adams, W. P., Burnet, P. F., Gordon, M. R. and Roots, E. F. 1987. Ottawa, Circumpolar and Scientific Affairs Directorate. 129 p, softback. ISBN 0-662-15414-2. Obtainable from the Circumpolar and Scientific Affairs Directorate, DIAND, Ottawa K1A 0H4, Canada.

In September 1985, following the Arctic Policy Conference at McGill University in Montreal, a working group was established to make recommendations to the then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Hon. Mr David Crombie, concerning the *setting up* of a National Polar Institute for Canada. The Institute would

be first class in both research and education, serving as the focus of other research institutions in Canada, where northern natives could participate in full.

The working group (the authors listed above, with E. F. Roots as chairman) produced their report in March 1987, and submitted it to the present Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Hon. Mr William McKnight. The report was released to the public in May 1987, and I review it in the capacity of a scientist with northern interests.

The report begins with good arguments on the importance of northern and polar research to Canada in the contexts of resources development, environmental conservation and protection, national sovereignty and security, etc. The present unsatisfactory state of polar research is convincingly exposed, listing major deficiencies: the wide dispersion of small research nuclei, each smaller than the critical mass and depending on one or two key persons; the working in isolation of these research units; the general lack of communication, co-ordination and liaison among them; the lack of structural or constitutional commitment to northern research by the universities and institutions to which these units belong; the lack of continuity and long-term planning; the absence of a point of contact in Canada with international polar institutions; the mediocrity of the research work; the lack of native participation in the research centres; the lack of interest in the Antarctic; the neglect of social-human research in preference of natural and applied research, etc.

This statement of the problems leads readers unavoidably to the conclusion that a national scientific focal point, an institution of distinction responsive to native inputs—the kind of institution probably envisaged by Mr Crombie—must be the solution. However, the working group avoids the issue, choosing instead to prolong the present unsatisfactory state of affairs by proposing cosmetic, superficial remedies. These include (1) the establishment of an *advisory* Canadian Polar Research Commission to regularly *appraise* northern sciences and *suggest* improvements; (2) the development of a polar information system; (3) the creation of a Polar House as the physical point of contact of northern research scientists and of other international institutions, and to provide the public with polar information; (4) increasing support for northern institutions and for northerners who are in other research centres; (5) better liaison and communication among government departments through the Canadian Polar Research Commission.

While the last two recommendations are universally applicable, it is difficult to see how implementation of the first three would solve current problems. Creating another bureaucracy, especially one with only an advisory role, will solve nothing. The report recommends that the Canadian Polar Research Commission should report to a high federal level, which would make it part of the federal bureaucracy. It is known that many northern natives view the federal government with suspicion, as an enemy representing the interest of the southern exploiters rather than a friend. How would the Commission be received by the natives? How could it maintain neutrality in reconciling south/north interests, especially in northerners' eyes?

Then who would maintain scientific visibility and continuity? Who would be doing the long-term planning and implementing the plans? The construction of a building alone does not create a Mecca; a temple of excellence must be filled with scientists of good repute who command respect. A national polar centre can exist only by recognition of continuing good work. The proposed Polar House could never be such a centre, and would soon become an empty shell. The polar information system is a sound scheme, but such systems already exist, for example at the Scott Polar Research Institute, and are available now for linking with a Canadian computer. It would be best if the computer were in a national centre of excellence, to be used by scientists who benefit by converging at the scientific Mecca.

I sense three reasons why the working group chose not to meet the problems head on. The first is the large number of research units in Canada, probably more than 50, that are already involved in polar research. In nominating one as the future centre of excellence the working party would have incurred the hostility of many others. Secondly, in view of the currently-expressed native sentiment that the north is better left alone without southern intrusions, the group may have felt it untimely to present a unified scheme for northern research that might further strengthen this sentiment. Thirdly, what of the Arctic Institute of North America, which was established by Act of Parliament in 1945 to do the job that might be expected of a National Polar Institute? For one reason or another the Institute has tried to assume this role but failed. Without rescinding the Act there is no legal basis for the establishment of another institution to do the same job. Rescinding of the Act could only be a political embarrassment to the Minister of DIAND, and no politician would want it.

The recommendations of the report will disappoint many, and indeed seem no more than a cop-out from a difficult political situation. Like many other Canadian scientists with a polar involvement I would have welcomed a more positive commitment toward a polar institution. If it is politically inexpedient to establish one now, let us aspire to one shortly, after a trial period in which rival institutions, including the Arctic Institute, demonstrate their suitability and weaker ones are eliminated from competition or strengthened by amalgamation. (Gee Tsang, National Water Research Institute, Burlington, Ont., Canada)

ALASKAN BOREAL FOREST ECOLOGY

FOREST ECOSYSTEMS IN THE ALASKAN TAIGA. van Cleve, K., Chapin III, F. S., Flanagan, P. W. Viereck, L. A. and Dyrness, C. T. (editors). 1986. Berlin, Springer-Verlag (Ecological Studies 57). 230p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 3-540-96251-4. DM128.

Taiga is a weasel-word, meaning pine forest, wet northern forest, sparsely-timbered forest edge or, as North Americans use it, simply boreal forest. This book, which originated in a conference at the Fairbanks campus of the University of Alaska in June 1983, is about the boreal forest—mostly about the ecology of the forest floor, but including insights into browsing, succession, fire and other aspects relevant to forest management. The book presents 'a synthetic overview of structure and function of taiga forest ecosystems in interior Alaska', in the form of 15 papers by individual or joint authors, grouped in three sections; the lead paper in each introduces the section.

The first section, 'Nature of taiga environment', covers the climate of the taiga; forest ecosystem distribution in the taiga environment; fire in taiga communities; and natural regeneration of trees and tall shrubs. The second, 'Environmental controls over organism activity', covers controls over growth and use of nutrients in taiga trees; nitrogen fixation; the (surprisingly competitive) role of bryophytes in nutrient cycling; and microbial activity and mineral availability on the forest floor. The third section, 'Environmental controls over ecosystem processes', deals with interactions of temperature, moisture and soil chemistry in controlling nutrient cycling and ecosystem development; application to white spruce forest of FORCYTE, a growth and yield model; associations of plants and phytophagous insects; and the effects of browsing on plant succession in the boreal forest. There is a useful index. This is a well-organized book, sensibly planned, of much interest to botanists, ecologists and foresters. (Bernard Stonehouse, Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge CB2 1ER.