

NUNAVUT NEWS

EDITORIAL: Resale royalty long overdue for Inuit artists

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Kenojuak Ashevak continues to bestow Nunavut – and Canada – with the gift of her artistry. Last month's auction of her famous 1960 stone cut print *The Enchanted Owl* garnered \$180,000 plus fees for a total of \$216,000. The sale set a new Canadian record for a print sold at auction.

The sale is almost four times Kenojuak's best previous auction price, \$59,000 in 2015 for *Rabbit Eating Seaweed*. That print was her first included in the annual Cape Dorset collection in 1959.

It's lovely that Kenojuak's owl now holds the record for top Canadian print considering the fact the previous record holder – *Speedway* by Sybil Andrews, which sold for \$129,000 in 2015 – could barely be called Canadian (no disrespect intended). Although Andrews migrated to Canada after World War II and *Speedway* is stunning, she created the print in 1934 while in England, more than a decade before she stepped foot on Canadian soil.

Kenojuak was the first woman to join the Cape Dorset printmaking co-operative, and a film about her work was nominated for an Oscar for Best Short Documentary in 1963. She has been featured in a Heritage Minute, and another print, *Owl's Bouquet*, was on the Canada 150 special edition \$10 bill.

In short, Kenojuak is an icon.

And yet federal law works against her legacy. While it's true retail sales of her work generate income in the form of licensed products – you may have seen her work on magnets and mugs at the airport – Kenojuak's estate does not receive a dime from any prints sold at auction.

This is the case for all Canadian artists but it is not so for artists in at least 93 countries, including all European Union nations. The 'droit de suite' is a French concept that indicates that the rights follow the work, so the artists and their heirs benefit from future sales.

The Canadian Artists Representation Copyright Collective (CARRC) is fighting to bring the "artist's resale right" (ARR) to Canada, at a rate of five per cent of the sale.

In other words, Kenojuak's family missed out on \$9,000 in royalties.

That's far more than Kenojuak received for the work in the first place. She sold the piece for \$24 in 1960.

The artist herself is quoted supporting the initiative on the collective's website. The case for adopting the idea is a strong one, especially for Inuit artists.

In their submission last month to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for the Statutory Review of the Copyright Act, CARCC notes that in Australia, ARR has benefited Indigenous artists most. Of the \$6.3 million in royalties generated for more than 1,600 artists in that country, 64 per cent of the money has gone to Indigenous artists.

CARCC states that ARR also tends to be of greater benefit to elder artists, whose work has increased in value over time.

By all measures, this is an initiative Nunavummiut should support. If you agree that Inuit artists shouldn't be left in the cold as art collectors and auction houses benefit from Inuit art, follow our lead. Put your feelings in writing, preferably in a letter to your MP and any other MP you think will listen.

The payoff for Inuit artists would be far more than the postage to Parliament Hill – which is free, by the way.
