

QIKIQTAALUK

⁵PP⁵b BAFFIN ISLAND 1913–14

by Jo-Anne Birnie-Danzker and Taqralik Partridge

Robert J. Flaherty's influential 1922 film *Nanook of the North* has been the subject of critique for its staged representations and disempowerment of the Inuit who worked on it. Two earlier Flaherty films and series of photographs shot in Nunavut also raise questions about Flaherty's relationships with and representations of local Inuit—though much of the footage was damaged. In this experimental text, Inuk writer and curator Taqralik Partridge and historian and curator Jo-Anne Birnie-Danzker collaborate to reflect on photographs from the creation of Flaherty's first film. In the process they tell the stories of the Qikiqtaalungmiut who brought the project to life, bridging historical documentation and living memory.

Robert J. Flaherty's first narrative film on the life of an Inuit family and their community, *Qikiqtaaluk* ${}^{5}P^{5}C_{_}{}^{5}$ *Baffin Island*, was shot between October 1, 1913, and August 23, 1914, during a prospecting expedition to the Amadjuak region of the Qikiqtaaluk in Nunavut.¹ More than 14,000 feet of silent film and numerous photographs were produced on location by Flaherty and Inuit cultural and technical teams.

Local Inuit actors played lead and supporting roles in the film but were often identified by Flaherty under a different name, sometimes the name of the character they portrayed. As such, names and oral histories provided by Inuit Elders and Knowledge Keepers have been adopted throughout this text, replacing inconsistent and incorrect identifications provided by Flaherty in his Qikiqtaaluk diary and subsequent publications.

Flaherty returned to the North in 1915 to take footage for his second film on the islands of Sanikiluaq, NU. Unfortunately the footage from both that film and the Qikiqtaaluk project were damaged in a fire while Flaherty was editing them in the South. In 1920 Flaherty secured funding from the French fur trading company Revillon Frères to produce his third film, *Nanook of the North* (1922), in Inukjuak, Nunavik, QC. Their contract stipulated that footage from both of his previous films would remain in the possession

of Revillon Frères until Flaherty left for Nunavik, and could not be used in the future without their written permission.²

The film footage subsequently disappeared and few of the vintage photographs taken by Flaherty in Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut survived. Flaherty's fragile glass plates and unstable nitrate negatives remained in the care of his estate and the Robert and Frances Flaherty Study Center until 1979³ when the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) commissioned an exhibition of vintage and modern photographs from the original plates and negatives, as well as a companion exhibition celebrating Inuit filmmaking and satellite broadcasting. Both exhibitions, *Robert Flaherty. Photographer / Filmmaker. The Inuit: 1910-1922* and *INUIT/T.V.*, were were curated by Birnie-Danzker and spanned from 1979 to 1981.4

The complex task of identifying the Inuit who were the subjects of Flaherty's photographs began in the 1970s with renowned Inuk photographer and historian Peter Pitseolak (1902–1973) who met Flaherty as a child, oral historian Dorothy Harley Eber, CM and curator and historian Birnie-Danzker.

This visual essay is dedicated to the Inuit of Qikiqtaaluk who shared Inuit Ilitqusia, the Inuit Way of Knowing, with Flaherty.

PREVIOUS
Inuit Women and Child
with Film Equipment
1913–1914
Digital photograph
ALL REPRODUCED WITH
PERMISSION THE FLAHERTY
COURTESY ROBERT J. FLAHERTY
DIGITAL ARCHIVE FONDS /
108, N2452
ALL PHOTOS ROBERT J.
FLAHERTY

NOTES

- 1 The film was entitled Baffin Island or Baffin-Landers in 1915. In this visual essay, the title has been changed to Qikiqtaaluk ⁵PP⁵C__b* Baffin Island in recognition of the original and reclaimed name of the land where the film was made and to acknowledge the Qikiqtaalungmiut who co-produced and realized the film.
- ² Jo-Anne Birnie-Danzker, Robert Flaherty. Photographer / Filmmaker. The Inuit: 1910-1922, exh. cat. (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1979), 56. A digital copy can be found at Internet Archive.
- ³ At the request of the Robert and Frances Flaherty Study Center, Robert J. Flaherty's glass plates and nitrate negatives been loaned to Library and Archives Canada for safe storage since 1979.
- 4 A 1980-81 repatriation exhibition, also entitled Robert Flaherty. Photographer / Filmmaker. The Inuit: 1910-1922, toured in Nunavik and Newfoundland and Labrador. It included the same photographs from the original exhibition and displayed Flaherty's Nanook of the North alongside them.

INUIT/T.V. was organized in collaboration with Tagak Curley, CM, ONu, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), Nunatsiakmiut Film Society; Pond Inlet Community T.V. Society; and the Inukshuk Project of ITK. It consisted of six television programs in Inuktitut produced by Inuit filmmakers, such as those from Nunatsiakmiut Film Society produced by Mosesie Kiponik, David Poisey and Joanasie Salomonie

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Tarrijad

These photos hold fascinating stories about little snippets of the lives of the Inuit actors and technicians from the Qikiqtaaluk Region who worked with Flaherty on this film. Even though these images are over one hundred years old, they're within living memory because of oral histories. People in those communities and beyond heard the stories of these people from their own relatives or community members, so, in a way, their stories are still living, and to see a face that goes with those stories is really special.

There are always people in the community who know stories about those who have passed on and share them. When I would hear stories about my dad's mom, they were told in such a way that they feel like any other family member who just happens to be maybe in another town or another location at this time. They are still alive, if not physically here.

In looking at these photos, I've been thinking a lot about how Inuit culture is so innovative. It's a cultural thing, an Inuit learning system, to be ready to take on new technologies. You take to things quickly because you must. You take to things by looking at them in 3D and understanding how they work. This is immediately clear in the image of the women and child with the camera.

So as opposed to the staged scene in *Nanook of the North* of Allakariallak looking at the gramophone in wonder and in confusion, it's more likely that Inuit who first encountered that new technology looked at it with a keen eye—looked at how it worked and how to work it themselves. Inuit at this point in time were able to learn the workings of the camera to use it to great effect, to recognize its power. Later photographers like Peter Pitseolak really understood what the value of that technology was, and I, being a photographer myself, think it's really exciting.

These photos also show us people dressed in beautiful Inuit clothing and wearing hairstyles that we still wear today. When I was a kid, we would have the hairstyle that Allego wears done for special occasions. I remember a Christmas concert where we were singing these really old Inuktitut songs and having hairdos like that; we wore braided ties with beaded tassels we had made in culture class.

The stories that accompany these photos—of Inuit leadership, artmaking and of running a dark room, in a hut, in the cold weather—are really fascinating to me. These are people who were doing something that they were interested in, participating in something new and amazing happening in their midst.

Knowing this, when I look at these photos, I wonder what the subjects are thinking about. The power of photography is that you feel that there is some kind of presence of that person even though they're long gone.

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Simeonie Quppapik identified the subject of this portrait as Nungusuituq (1890–1950), who was the son of Tooeemee (Joe) and Lao, and a cousin of Peter Pitseolak.⁵ Flaherty stated in his diary that Nungusuituq was married to Luliakame.⁶

Nungusuituq provided invaluable cultural and technical knowledge during the production of *Qikiqtaaluk 'PP'b'C_b' Baffin Island* and possibly portrayed the lead role of Anunglung in the film. Pitseolak recalled that Nungusuituq was "the one [Flaherty] took pictures of.... [Nungusuituq] was the first one to draw; the picture makers made him draw.... I remember he told me it was tiring to make drawings." Becades later Krista Ulujuk Zawadski and Jo Poortenaar described Nungusuituq's drawings and subsequent prints as "a pivotal and significant, yet often overlooked, mark on the vast landscape of Inuit art history."

Flaherty described Nungusuituq as "easily first in either sledge driving or hunting amongst the motion picture retainers of the post, and more than that he was the [Inuk] artist par excellence at either drawing or carving in ivory." ¹⁰ One of Nungusuituq's drawings, *Innuit Pektockseauk (Esquimaux Playing a Game)* (c. 1913–14), inspired a scene in the film.¹¹

The premiere screening of *Qikiqtaaluk PPSbC_b* Baffin Island in March 1915 was accompanied by an exhibition of Flaherty's collection at the Royal Ontario Museum, which included several of Nungusuituq's drawings. 12 In 1930 several of his pencil drawings were displayed at an exhibition of Eskimo Arts and Crafts organized by the Canadian Handicrafts Guild (now La Guilde) at the McCord National Museum (now the McCord Stewart Museum) in Montreal, QC. When Nungusuituq's drawings were again shown in the 1979 Flaherty exhibition organized by the VAG, the New York Times described them as "black-and-white silhouettes in two or three tones—dark figures against a white ground with landscape features . . . indicated only when essential to the idea of the picture . . . they are vivid and intensely realistic portrayals of important events of [Inuit] life . . . they nearly steal the show from [Flaherty's] photographs." 13

⁵ Birnie-Danzker, 1979, 86; Peter Pitseolak and Dorothy Harley Eber, People from our side: An Inuit record of Seekooseelak – the land of the people of Cape Dorset, Baffin Island, trans. Ann Hanson (Isdemonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1975), 56.

⁶ "Robert J. Flaherty Diary," March 1, 1914, Robert Joseph Flaherty papers, 1884–1970. Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

Dorothy Harley Eber, "On Koodjuk's Trail," *Natural History*, vol. 88, no. 1, January 1979, 83.

8 Pitseolak and Eber, 1975, 88.

⁹ Krista Ulujuk Zawadski and Jo Poortenaar, "Indelible Ink: The Enduring Images of Nungusuituq," *Inuit* Art Quarterly, September 15, 2019, 52.

¹⁰ Birnie-Danzker, 1979, 60.

¹¹ Birnie-Danzker, 1979, 54.

"Strange Eskimo Tribe Wore Eiderdown. Valuable Mementoes of Mr. Flaherty's Expedition Collected in Ontario Museum," The Globe; Mar 29, 1915; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Globe and Mail. Reproduced in Birnie-Danzker 1979, 63, with incorrect, handwritten date.

Gene Thornton, "Flaherty's View of Eskimo Life," New York Times, May 4, 1980.

It's a cultural thing, an Inuit learning system, to be ready to take on new technologies. You take to things quickly because you must.

OPPOSITE

Camera Study of

Nungusuituq
1913–1914

Digital photograph

COURTESY ROBERT J. FLAHERTY
DIGITAL ARCHIVE FONDS /
36 N176





Pitseolala Kelly and Peter Pitseolak identified the subject of this portrait as Allego, who would later become an illustrious angakkuq (shaman) with fire and seaweed as tuurngait (helping spirits). Artist Ulayu Pingwartok (1904–1978) of Kinngait (Cape Dorset), NU, recalled Allego's important role as Flaherty's darkroom assistant in Eteenik, an ilagiit nunagivaktangat (seasonal camp) along the coast, northwest of Kimmirut, NU.

Allego was helping Koodjuk [Flaherty] with the developing, and we were told that when they were developing there was not supposed to be light coming into the house. We used to peek through the door . . . and run away. . . . After I was grown up Allego used to tell me, "When you were a wee girl you used to be naughty looking into Koodjuk's house when we were developing." 15

It is a tribute to Allego's embodiment of Inuit societal values, such as qanuqtuurniq (innovation and resourcefulness) and pilimmaksarniq (developing skills through careful observation), that the fragile glass plates and nitrate negatives she developed with Flaherty more than one hundred years ago remain a powerful visual archive of Qikiqtaalungmiut, the people of the Qikiqtaaluk.

Flaherty's makeshift darkroom was a shack that was described as a "large box;' and the women used the outside for 'nailing up sealskins

to dry." ¹⁶ Allego enjoyed sitting outside, listening to Flaherty's gramophone with her friends Kanajuq and Kingnatchia. ⁷⁷ Flaherty brought a library of over four hundred records to Qikiqtaaluk, "numerous enough to cover the complete scale of musical taste which indeed ran to extremes in Amadjuak." ¹⁸

Mumamee Shaa recalled that Flaherty taught Allego and her sister, Emenik, to write. "They couldn't write on paper because the weather was too cold. They used to look for stones and blow on them. If their breaths made a white surface, they would write with a stick." ¹⁹

Flaherty had chosen Eteenik for his winter base because of its proximity to good game and the presence of fresh water throughout the year—which is necessary to develop motion picture films. It was also a gathering point for Inuit along the seaboard.²⁰ Flaherty described "the memorable days when we were in the hut" as filled with gossip, smoking, listening to music and playing billiards on a miniature table.²¹

Elders in Kinngait suggested that Allego may have been living with Nungusuituq when this photograph was taken.²² Later she moved away with an older man from a northern region, returning many years later as an angakkuq with beautiful tattoos. She married another angakkuq, Alariak, and they became important angakkuit in the Kinngait area. Allego eventually left Alariak and moved to Churchill, MB, where she died around 1957.²³

¹⁴ Birnie-Danzker, 1979, 86; Eber, 1979, 79.

TAGRALIK PARTRIDGE

I remember a
Christmas concert
where we were singing
these really old Inuktitut
songs and having
hairdos like that; we
wore braided ties with
beaded tassels we had
made in culture class.

OPPOSITE
Camera Study of Allego
1913—1914
Digital photograph
COURTESY ROBERT J. FLAHERTY
DIGITAL ARCHIVE FONDS /
33, N206

¹⁵ Eber, 1979, 79.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Birnie-Danzker, 1979, 86. In later publications, Flaherty identified photographs of Kanajuq, the lead female actor in the 1914 film, by the name of the role she portrayed, "Allegoo (Shining Water)." When Flaherty speaks of "Allegoo" in his diary, it is not certain if he is referring to the person Allego or to Kanajuq (who portrayed the character "Allegoo").

¹⁸ "Robert J. Flaherty Diary," September 20-25, 1913.

¹⁹ Eber, 1979, 79.

^{20 &}quot;Robert J. Flaherty Diary," September 12, 1913.

Robert J. Flaherty, My Eskimo Friends: "Nanook of the North." In collaboration with Frances Hubbard Flaherty. (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924), 122.

²² Birnie-Danzker, 1979, 86.

²³ Birnie-Danzker, 1979, 86; Eber, 1979, 79.

Renowned artists Pitseolak Ashoona, CM, RCA (c. 1904–1983), Mary Qayuaryuk (Kudjuarjuk) (1908-1982) and Pudlo Pudlat (1916-1992) identified the subject of this portrait as Avaleeniatuk, the adoptive brother of Nungusuituq and adopted son of Tooeemee (Joe) and Lao, which Peter Pitseolak and Kinngait Elders confirmed.24

Peter Pitseolak, a close relative of Avaleeniatuk, described him as "the real worker" during Flaherty's sojourn on Qikiqtaaluk.25 In his publications, however, Flaherty ascribed this role to someone named "Anunglung." It is highly probable, and may be assumed, that Avaleeniatuk and "Anunglung" are the same person.26

On December 31, 1913, Avaleeniatuk was secured as a dog team driver for Flaherty's long journeys.27 His multiple roles included guide, hunter, production assistant and actor.

Avaleeniatuk embodied the Inuit value of qanuqtuurniq (innovation and resourcefulness). He repaired lashing and broken shoeing on sleds, hunted barren-ground caribou and provided Flaherty with a wealth of information about the region, sharing Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, living knowledge that Inuit have always known to be true, and pilimmaksarniq, knowledge acquired through careful observation. He explained to Flaherty that "igloos made of this salt snow off sea ice are warmer than one of land snow, which forms into ice more quickly." 28

Flaherty and Avaleeniatuk reached the mouth of Amadjuak Bay on March 1, 1914. That evening, spectacular northern lights undulated in successive curtains, culminating "in a maelstrom of swirling light [of] wonderful apple greens, lavender, old rose and cream, and through it all the stars shone. . . . So low did the fingers hang to our moving sledge that they seemed almost in reaching distance." 29

In August, Flaherty departed the Qikiqtaaluk forever with a northeast wind and clear sparkling weather. "With more reluctance than I can describe," he wrote, "we bade farewell to [the Qikiqtaalungmiut], for whom we really learned to care." 30 Among them were two remarkable brothers, Nungusuituq and Avaleeniatuk. The question remains: who portrayed Baffin Island? Was it the charismatic Nungusuituq, of whom Flaherty "took pictures," or the "real worker,"

Ten years after Flaherty left the Amadjuak region, Avaleeniatuk and his family died while out on the land. 28

- ²⁴ Birnie-Danzker, 1979, 86.
- ²⁵ Pitseolak and Eber, 1975, 88.
- ²⁶ The name "Anunglung" has been changed to Avaleeniatuk in this article, except when it refers to the lead role in Qikiqtaaluk ^ςΡρ^ςιος Βaffin Island.
- $^{\rm 27}$ "Robert J. Flaherty Diary," December 31,
- ²⁸ "Robert J. Flaherty Diary," February 28,
- ²⁹ "Robert J. Flaherty Diary," March 1, 1914.
- ³⁰ "Robert J. Flaherty Diary," August 19, 1914.
- ³¹ Eber, 1979, 83-84.
- 32 Birnie-Danzker, 1979, 85.
- 33 Pitseolak and Eber, 1975, 70-72.
- 34 The series, Those Were the Days was published in Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's newsletter Inuit Monthly (later Inuit Today) between 1974-1975. The series was reprinted in Inuit Today as "The Writings of Akavik."
- 35 The exhibition was organized by Carleton University Art Gallery in Ottawa, and toured from September 2018-March 2020.

Camera Study of Digital photograph

OPPOSITE

Avaleeniatuk

COURTESY ROBERT J. FLAHERTY DIGITAL ARCHIVE FONDS /

1913-1914

The haunting aspect of these photos is that they put faces to people that live in the community consciousness still.







Arnitok Ipeelee, a respected civic leader, identified this portrait of his father, Inutsiaq (1896–1967),³² whose name is often anglicized as Ennutsiak. Inutsiaq was a renowned artist admired for his depictions of family and community life, capturing the everyday experiences of Inuit. Born in Nunavik, Inutsiaq lived on Tujjaat (Nottingham Island), NU, before moving to Sikusiilaq, NU. He lived a nomadic life before settling in Iqaluit, NU.

Peter Pitseolak recalled meeting Inutsiaq on Tujjaat when his family travelled there to bring relatives to Sikusiilaq. 33 Pitseolak's father thought he saw an inuksuk but it was actually Inutsiaq "on top of a hill watching us. When he saw us he started to run. Our people acted as if there was a big ship. They were so happy to be with other people." Inutsiaq lived on Tujjaat in a tent with his widowed mother, Annagajuk, and sister, Aguteewoluk. Pitseolak recalled:

Altogether the people living in [Tujjaat] whom my family tried to come and get were 46. They were that many and they had an ordinary Eskimo sealskin boat. [Then the ship *Active* arrived, which] took us back to our homeland....

Altogether with the people from [Tujjaat] and all of us, we were 57 persons. There were that many of us taken to Tikerak [near Kinngait] on

the ship *Active* and brought back to [Sikusiilaq] in the year 1908.

One of Inutsiaq's largest works, the stone and ivory sculpture *Umiaq Migration* from the late 1950s, recalls this journey. It depicts a crowded umiaq, a large, open skin boat, moving across water.

Inutsiaq's grandson, Alootook Ipellie (1951–2007), the son of Joanassie Ipellie and Napatchie, was born in Nuvuqquq, an ilagiit nunagivaktangit near Iqaluit. An artist, writer and Inuktitut translator, Alootook Ipellie lived for some time with his uncle and then with Inutsiaq, who had a profound influence on him. In 1975 Ipellie published *My Grandfather's Story, Inukshuk*, a fictional assemblage in eighteen parts that honoured Inutsiaq.³⁴ His highly influential book, *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*, was published in 1993.

In 2018 Sandra Dyck, Heather Igloliorte and Christine Lalonde curated a retrospective exhibition titled *Alootook Ipellie: Walking Both Sides of an Invisible Border*, ³⁵ which included this photograph of Inutsiaq adjacent to an untitled ink drawing (circa 1987) by Ipellie appropriating, transforming and reclaiming Flaherty's image of his grandfather. In contrast to Flaherty's camera study, Ipellie's drawing situates Inutsiaq, a revered Knowledge Keeper and Elder, firmly within his community, surrounded by children.

OPPOSITE

Camera Study of Inutsiaq
1913–1914

Digital photograph
COURTESY ROBERT J. FLAHERTY
DIGITAL ARCHIVE FONDS / 21A,
N2096, N2433

Jo-Anne Birnie-Danzker is the former Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Frye Art Museum in Seattle, and Museum Villa Stuck in Munich, and former Director and CEO of the Biennale of Sydney. In 2022 she founded the Robert J. Flaherty Digital Archive Fonds and was commissioned by Avataq Cultural Institute in Nunavik to produce a community-curated exhibition in Inukjuak celebrating the centenary of *Nanook of the North* (1922)

Taqralik Partridge is a writer, artist and curator from Kuujjuaq, Nunavik, QC, based in Ottawa, ON. Partridge's artistic work focuses on and celebrates Inuit life in the North and in the South. Partridge has held positions as Editor-at-Large for the *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Director of the Nordic Lab at SAW, Adjunct Curator at the Art Gallery of Guelph and Associate Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

It's important to—as much as we know—tell the story of these photos and the people in them, and the other people who worked with Flaherty; to recognize that these Inuit had agency—had amazing capabilities. I hope that people can be encouraged by that. That even though they were not part of the larger, Western, commercial-capitalist world, it doesn't mean that what they did has any less value. What we value, as Inuit, from these films and photos—staged as they were—are the record of our relatives and the stories that

go with them.

TAGRALIK