Conversations in Miniature: Historic collections of Inuit models and miniatures 1890-1910.

Project Description

The purpose of this research project is to learn more about historic museum collections of Inuit models and miniatures produced in the Cumberland Sound and Cape Fullerton regions. This research project has two primary aims: to learn more about how and why miniatures and models were extensively collected by museums in the past, and to find out more about how contemporary Inuit communities view these historic collections today. The research focuses on four significant collections of Inuit material culture which were collected in the regions of Cumberland Sound and Cape Fullerton between 1890 and 1910: the Borden Collection at the Canadian Museum of Civilization; the Comer and Mutch Collections at the American Museum of Natural History, and the Peck Collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Field Research

Field research for this project is being conducted in two northern communities, Pangnirtung and Chesterfield Inlet, between September 2012 and May 2013. These communities were chosen because they are the nearest settlements to where the historic collections originated. The purpose of this field research is to learn more about Inuit beliefs about the role of miniature and model objects in Inuit life, and about how these beliefs or objects may have changed since the time when these objects were first collected. The goal of this fieldwork is to learn more about the kinds of Inuit values and knowledge (*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*) associated with miniatures and models, and about what changes have occurred in the production, use and distribution of Inuit miniatures and models over the past century.

Methods and Data

During these research visits, I will host a number of 'open house' sessions where community members can review photographs of the models and miniatures and discuss the objects. I will work with community members to review and discuss the collections. I will also meet with elders and artists to seek recommendations on how museums can better describe and display these models and miniatures to the public. The data from this research will be used in an anthropology thesis that will be submitted for a Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Oxford.

For further information, please contact:
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