

## **A Collection Carved in Stone**

By Natalie Ribkoff, TD Art Curator 1988-2011

In the mid-1960s, the Toronto-Dominion Bank, today part of the TD Bank Financial Group, embarked on a groundbreaking project that would ultimately create the most complete collection of Inuit art in existence to that date. By painstakingly gathering a 1,000-piece collection of post-World War II Inuit sculpture and prints -and displaying them at the top of the tallest building in the Commonwealth - the Bank inspired respect and recognition among the international art community, and national pride, for an indigenous art form that has come to hold an important place in the Canadian identity.

### **The Vision for the Collection**

The Inuit Art Collection of The Toronto-Dominion Bank was assembled to mark Canada's 100th birthday in 1967. The Bank wanted a Centennial project that not only honoured Canada's past but also looked ahead to its future. At the annual conference of the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada on 3 May 1965, Allen Thomas Lambert, then president and chairman of the TD Bank, announced the establishment of the "world's finest and most comprehensive collection of Inuit Art." One of the original objectives of the Centennial collection was to help differentiate the relatively smaller TD Bank from other financial institutions. Mr. Lambert strongly believed that, while the company could not garner attention or compete solely based on its size, the Bank could find other ways to stand out. It planned to arrange a high-profile, cross-country tour of the collection once assembled, with the intention of promoting Inuit art and raising awareness of the TD Bank Financial Group.<sup>2</sup> Inspired by the art collection of the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York, Mr. Lambert believed that having art on display in the workplace did not just enhance the corporate environment, it also provided employees and customers with a way

to forge relationships. Mr. Lambert advocated "that banking was about relationships," and therefore the establishment of an Inuit collection for the Bank also made good business sense.<sup>3</sup> When the Bank's Centennial project was announced, the construction of what was to become one of Toronto's architectural jewels was well underway. Located at the corner of King and Bay streets in Toronto, the complex, designed by the internationally acclaimed architect Mies van der Rohe, was to house the headquarters of the TD Bank.<sup>4</sup> Intensely devoted to every detail of the soon-to-be completed structure, including its interior furnishings, Mies van der Rohe encouraged Mr. Lambert to complement the building's interior with great works of art. In 1962, Mr. Lambert enlisted an expert to aid in the purchase of a small number of paintings for the TD Bank executive offices. The former director of the Art Gallery of Toronto, Martin Baldwin, was asked to catalogue the existing thirty paintings and to advise the Bank on further purchases. Under Baldwin's guidance, Mr. Lambert and a small committee of Bank officers sought out work by young Canadian artists - a crucial initiative at a time when the country's artists were struggling for recognition. The Bank's primary collecting strategy maintained that acquisitions were to be of the highest quality, artists were to be Canadian citizens, and the work purchased should be suited for display in the corporate environment. To date, the TD Bank Canadian Art Collection, comprising Contemporary Canadian and Inuit art, numbers over 5,000 works.

### **Drawing Inspiration from Canada's North**

In addition to his interest in the arts, Mr. Lambert was very fond of the North, having managed the Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, branch of the Bank of Toronto earlier in his career (1946-47).<sup>5</sup> The branch was a two-room log cabin, and he had worked in the front room and lived in the back. During his stay in Yellowknife, Mr. Lambert developed an appreciation for the people and the natural resources of the region. He felt that the Arctic held great promise for growth, and he thought it appropriate to assemble a collection of art highlighting a region that would be tomorrow's frontier.<sup>6</sup> In the foreword to the catalogue *The Eskimo Art Collection of the Toronto-Dominion Bank* (1967), Mr. Lambert noted that "perhaps no one has helped

more to focus public attention on the North than the Eskimo sculptor."<sup>7</sup> He hoped that by the Bank's assembling a collection of this art and sharing it with the public, the Inuit themselves would have a greater opportunity to inform others about their culture and traditions.

### **Establishing the Committee**

The planning for the Inuit collection began in 1965.<sup>8</sup> That spring, initial contact was made with prospective committee members who would assist with acquiring the works. To ensure that the collection would be of the highest calibre, Mr. Lambert looked for individuals who were knowledgeable about the North and Inuit art. He also requested that the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Hudson's Bay Company, and the Québec Government put forward the names of proposed participants.<sup>9</sup> The committee, consisting of eleven individuals selected from across Canada, was co-chaired by M.F. (Budd) Feheley and Charles S. Band, two leading collectors of Inuit art.<sup>10</sup> Committee members included: George Swinton, a professor at the University of Manitoba School of Art and an author on the subject; Alma Houston, a key figure at the Canadian Arctic Producers (CAP); William Larmour, Arts and Crafts supervisor of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; Martin Baldwin, the former director of the Art Gallery of Toronto and art advisor to the TD Bank; Norman White, superintendent of Advertising and Public Relations TD Bank; Allen Cupples, creative director of James Lovick Ltd.; Eric Gourdeau, director-general for Nouveau-Québec, Québec Ministry of Natural Resources; Jeremy N. Watney of the Industrial Promotion Section of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; and Walter C. Koerner, a director of the Bank who was made a Companion of the Order of Canada in 1967 for his service to the arts.<sup>11</sup>

"A desire to make the spirit and the life of the Inuit, which is uniquely reflected in his art, more widely known and understood by his fellow-Canadians" was the primary motivation of the committee members, who agreed to help on a voluntary basis.<sup>12</sup> Much of the success of the Centennial project is attributable to the activities and personal relationships that individual committee members brought to the table. Some members sought out carvings while in the North on other business, sometimes hitching rides on transport aircraft to reach isolated communities.<sup>13</sup> Three members of the Bank's committee - Budd Feheley, Alma Houston, and George Swinton - were also members of the Canadian Eskimo Art Committee (CEAC).<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Alma Houston's position as director of Fine Arts at Canadian Arctic Producers allowed her to set aside carvings that she thought would be of interest to the Bank as soon as they came down from the North.<sup>15</sup> Through the research for his 1965 book *Eskimo Sculpture*, George Swinton had become familiar with many of the public and private collectors of Inuit art

### **Assembling the Collection**

"Buy what you see and like," Mr. Lambert instructed the committee members. The sole purchasing limitation was that they were to acquire only works that were completed, as opposed to commissioning works from artists.<sup>16</sup> Members were encouraged to buy both individual pieces and whole collections. Given that the objective was to assemble the best collection possible, the committee worked without a formal acquisitions budget.<sup>17</sup> To fulfill the mandate, committee members travelled throughout the Arctic and southern Canada between 1965 and 1967. The first carvings were submitted to the selection committee by the summer of 1965, and by January 1967 some 900 pieces had been purchased from dealers, craft shops, private collectors, the Eskimo Museum in Churchill, and from the various arts and crafts projects funded by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. They included soapstone and bone carvings, ivory miniatures, and graphic art. There were even some experimental ceramic pieces from Rankin Inlet.<sup>18</sup>

"Hundreds of carvings would be laid out on tables," recalled former TD Bank chairman Richard Thomson of visits by committee members and Bank officers to view the selections. All of the artwork was shipped to the Toronto offices of TDF Artists Ltd., which was owned by Budd Feheley. Committee members would go through all of the items, setting aside those to be included in the collection. The committee was instructed to sell off the remaining pieces.<sup>19</sup> To ensure that the Bank's collection contained examples of early works, the committee approached private collectors to see if they would part with some of their significant pieces. Jerry Twomey, Mrs. R.B. Tinling, Mr. N.H. Abramson, Mr.

L. Berman, and Ian Lindsay were among the individuals who allowed the Bank to purchase works from their personal collections. According to Jerry Twomey, collectors such as himself "were proud to be participating in a project that would bring Inuit art to a larger audience; we did it to further the cause - it was the patriotic thing to do."<sup>20</sup> Pieces belonging to committee members Budd Feheley, Charles Band, and George Swinton also formed part of the Bank's original collection.

### **Composition of the Collection**

The original collection consisted of just under 1,000 works, and among these were sculptures done in stone, bone, and ivory, along with prints, drawings, and ceramics. With an emphasis on works created after World War II and up to 1967, the collection included artists from across the Canadian Arctic; representing the major communities where carving took place.<sup>21</sup> From the outset, excellence was the guiding principle behind all purchases. Pieces were selected on their artistic merit, as opposed to ethnological grounds. In the process, many individual artists were represented in depth. The collection contains many small carvings and delicate ivory pieces that were characteristic of the art made prior to 1950. During this time, the Inuit had a largely migratory lifestyle, living off the land and moving from camp to camp in search of food. Objects produced during this period had to be small enough to be

transported over large distances, and they were made primarily for trade with the HBC post or travellers to the Arctic. The Bank's collection also illustrates the transition from the production of smaller to relatively larger carvings that occurred in the late 1940s. From 1949 on, James Houston and other animators encouraged Inuit artists to develop their carving styles and try new media. The initial collection held many examples of early printmaking at Cape Dorset. The Bank was among the first collectors to acquire Inuit ceramics from Rankin Inlet.<sup>22</sup>

### **Unveiling the Centennial Collection**

As part of the Centennial year celebrations, a selection of 200 sculptures and prints was presented at the Gallery of Modern Art in New York during "Canada Week." In Toronto, the collection was installed on the 55th floor of the TD Bank Tower in time for the Bank's 112th Annual General Meeting of Shareholders on 9 January 1968. When the TD Centre officially opened on 14 May 1968, the Inuit art was prominently on display on the observation deck. Thousands of visitors came to the building - the tallest structure in the British Commonwealth at the time - to enjoy the spectacular view of the city. While they may not have made the visit for the express purpose of viewing the Inuit collection, many people still associate the TD Bank with Inuit art because they remember seeing the carvings on display when the TD Centre first opened. TD's new collection shone the spotlight on an art form that had been generally overlooked by the Canadian public up to that point. Over the years, the collection has been selectively modified to ensure that it retains its reputation as one of the finest holdings of Inuit art in existence. After the closure of the TD Tower observation deck in 1977, a decision was made to reduce the collection to a more manageable size. In 1982, a significant addition was made with the purchase of 100 works from Budd Feheley. These works had been assembled by the Smithsonian Institution for a travelling exhibition in the United States.<sup>23</sup> The Bank's current collection of Inuit art consists of 610 pieces,

and it has largely retained its 1945 to 1967 focus.

In an attempt to make the collection available to a broader public, exhibits of smaller works, complete with their own display cases and travelling crates, were organized. These "mini exhibitions" were sent primarily to Bank branches for special events such as openings. They were also provided to various not-for-profit organizations such as schools and hospitals. As well, works have been loaned to public museums and galleries for display in such exhibitions as the 1971 *Sculpture of the Inuit: Masterworks of the Canadian Arctic*, which travelled to various countries including the Soviet Republic. Three significant tours of the major pieces have been mounted by the Gallery of Modern Art, New York, in 1967, the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, in 1972, and the National Arts Centre, Ottawa, in 1976.<sup>24</sup>

### **Becoming Part of the TD Bank Heritage**

Within the Bank, the art soon grew in popularity, bringing requests for carvings from across the organization; today, most larger domestic and international offices boast at least one Inuit sculpture. The rest of the works, including Inuit prints and drawings, are located in offices throughout the Bank's global operations. As a result of the Bank's corporate art collection, many employees have been able to develop a greater understanding of Inuit art without having to make a special trip to a museum or gallery. For some individuals, having ready access to works of art has sparked their own personal collecting activities or helped stimulate creative thinking in their day-to-day work. Through the years, TD's marketing efforts reinforced their association with Inuit art. An Inuit carving is often presented as a gift to important clients, visitors, retiring board members, or dignitaries. For many years, an annual corporate Christmas card was produced highlighting a sculpture from the collection. Corporate Banking presentations often featured images of carvings to reinforce the concept that the Toronto-Dominion Bank was a unique, Canadian player in the International Financial Services sector.<sup>25</sup>



## **Establishing a Permanent Home for the Collection**

When the Centennial project was first conceived, the intention was to have the exhibition travel the country, and no thought was given to the question of where to house the works on a permanent basis. New possibilities opened up when the Bank's officers realized that there would be an observation deck atop the TD Tower.<sup>26</sup> From January 1968 on, the core of the Inuit art collection remained on display on the 55th floor observation deck.<sup>27</sup> With the closure of the observation deck in 1977, a number of ideas were considered for displaying the popular collection. These included placing a selection of the works in the lobbies of the three TD Centre towers, allocating office space to serve as a gallery, extending the link between the main Bank branch and the TD Tower, or offering the collection to a museum on long-term loan.<sup>28</sup> A delay in the Centre's planned renovation of the 55th floor enabled the collection to return to the top of the TD Tower with an exhibition entitled *The Art of the Inuit - Tradition and Innovation* in June of 1978. The issue of where to house the collection was finally resolved in 1982 when the Bank and its partner in the TD Centre, the Cadillac Fairview Corporation, finalized plans to add a fourth tower to the complex. Their plans included the construction of Canada's first gallery devoted exclusively to Inuit art and the first corporate gallery ever created in the country.<sup>29</sup> As part of this process, all of the Inuit pieces were recalled from across Canada and gathered together in one location. The Bank outfitted the top floor of a TD Bank branch at the corner of Yonge and Gerrard streets in Toronto to house the collection during the gallery planning stages.<sup>30</sup> The carvings were assessed for potential inclusion in the display, with the final selection of 200 pieces representing all regions of the Canadian Arctic, the finest contemporary Inuit artists, the most historically significant pieces, and the dominant themes in Inuit art.

On 20 March 1986, Dr. Joseph Martin, director of the National Gallery of Canada, opened the gallery to the public. "Inuit art has become part of our identity as a corporation. With this gallery, we are able to do the collection justice, and share it more directly with the community," remarked Bank chairman Richard Thomson at the inaugural celebration.<sup>32</sup> The Bank has maintained this commitment by operating the gallery, free of charge to the public, seven days a week ever since.<sup>33</sup>

### **Lasting Impact of the Centennial Project**

Through the establishment of the Inuit Art Committee in 1965, the Bank was able to capitalize on the knowledge and passion of some of the pioneers in the field. With the Bank's financial resources behind them, committee members were able to ensure that Inuit art was treated as a serious art form. The Bank's holdings incorporate the personal visions of several prominent collectors, among them Ian Lindsay, Budd Feheley, and Jerry Twomey. Their individual visions merge in the collected works to give viewers a better understanding of this truly significant art form. The establishment of one of the nation's first corporate art collections has also had implications for the broader cultural sector in Canada. From its inception, the TD Bank Inuit art collection has been a model of the way that private corporations could contribute to the quality of life in the country; and many other Canadian corporations have gone on to display original works of art in their premises. In creating the Inuit art collection, the Bank demonstrated foresight: it recognized the artistic value of Inuit art well before most public galleries were doing so on a large scale. Having the Bank's collection on display in public venues such as the 55th floor observation deck and the TD Bank Gallery of Inuit Art helped to reinforce the idea that Inuit art should be accorded the same respect as other types of artwork created in Canada. Today, nearly forty years after the project was initiated, the Inuit Art Collection of the TD Bank has maintained its reputation as one of the finest collections of Inuit art in existence. The Bank and its committee members, through their vision and commitment, successfully attained their objective: the establishment of a comprehensive collection, representing the major communities and the best artists, that captures a crucial period in the development of Inuit art. Through the public display of

this collection, the Bank has helped raise awareness of Inuit art among audiences both in Canada and around the world.

## Notes

1 Financial Post Conference: Corporate Donations and the Arts. Remarks by Allen Thomas Lambert, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Toronto Dominion Bank, 10 November 1976, Royal York Hotel, Toronto. 2 Taped interview between Natalie Ribkoff and Richard M. Thomson, 29 July 2004. 3 Taped interview between Robert Swain, Natalie Ribkoff, and Allen Lambert, 3 May 1994. 4 Mr. Lambert served as President, TD Centre Ltd., 1963-68. The TD Centre was a jointly owned project of the TD Bank and the developer CEMP. Each party owned 50%. *Toronto Modern Architecture 1945 to 1965* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1987). The scope of the TD Centre project is outlined on p. 77 as: 3.1 million sq. feet of office space; 22.5 million sq. feet of banking space; 154,000 sq. feet of shopping concourse; underground parking for 700 cars. 5 "We Return to Yellowknife," Toronto Dominion Bank, *Bank Notes* 33:3 (May-June 1973). 6 Taped interview between Robert Swain, Natalie Ribkoff, and Allen Lambert, 3 May 1994. An Inuit art collection was one of many ideas put forward for the Bank's Centennial project. While Mr. Lambert could not remember which of his advisors came up with the original suggestion, he did recall that "the idea of an Inuit collection appealed to him partially because he had spent some time in the North." 7 *The Eskimo Art Collection of the Toronto-Dominion Bank* (Toronto: TD Bank, 1967). Foreword by Allen Thomas Lambert, p. 1. 8 Taped interview between Natalie Ribkoff and Richard M. Thomson, 29 July 2004. While the decision to assemble an Inuit art collection had been taken by June 1963, the actual planning did not begin until 1965 when Mr. Lambert and Mr. Paton, Bank Vice-President, chose the Inuit Art Committee members. 9 Taped interview between Natalie Ribkoff, Patricia Feheley, and Budd Feheley, 10 August 2004. Letter dated 15 July 1965 from Sam Paton, Vice-President and General Manager TD Bank, to Rene Levesque, then Québec's Minister of Natural Resources. The Feheleys explained that in 1965 the support of the Government and Hudson's Bay officials would have been required for a project of this scope to be successful.

10 M.F. Feheley continued his involvement with the Bank's Inuit collection, serving as a freelance consultant for many years. 11 Composition of the Committee: Co-Chairmen: M.F. Feheley and Charles S. Band. Purchasing Committee: M.F. Feheley,\* Toronto; Alma Houston,\* Ottawa, George Swinton,\* Winnipeg; William Larmour, Ottawa. Selection Committee: C.S. Band, Toronto; M.F. Feheley, Toronto; Martin Baldwin, Toronto; Alma Houston, Ottawa; Walter Koerner, Vancouver; George Swinton, Winnipeg; Eric Gourdeau, Québec City; Jeremy Watney, Ottawa. Advisory Committee: The above-listed, along with Allen K. Cupples, Toronto, and Norman A. White, Toronto.

\* Indicates membership on CEAC See note 14. 12 *The Eskimo Art Collection of the Toronto-Dominion Bank* (Toronto: TD Bank, 1967). Introduction by M.F. Feheley and C.S. Band, p. 2. 13 Telephone conversation between Natalie Ribkoff and Jerry Twomey, 30 September 2004. Mr. Twomey noted that George Swinton would take advantage of any possible opportunity to travel to the Arctic. 14 The Canadian Eskimo Art Committee (CEAC) had been established by the federal Government in 1961 as an arm's-length agency to help bring original prints to the attention of southern Canada. It was intended to function as an independent professional arts advisor, both to Inuit artists in the North and to the Department. *Arctic Expressions: Inuit Art and the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council, 1961 - 1989* (Kleinburg, Ont: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1994), pp. 12,13. 15 Taped interview between Natalie Ribkoff, Patricia Feheley, and Budd Feheley, 10 August 2004. Alma put pieces away for the Bank in a back room, would let them be viewed on consignment, and if rejected, they were returned to CAP. 16 Taped interview between Robert Swain, Natalie Ribkoff, and Allen Lambert, 3 May 1994. Concerned that the pieces be unique. Mr. Lambert did not want the committee identifying particular artists and having them produce works for the collection. 17 Taped interview between Natalie Ribkoff and Richard M. Thomson, 29 July 2004. Mr. Thomson noted that "there was no budget, and he could not recall how much money they paid or how much they sold things for. It was not really relevant and no one paid attention to it" 18 George Swinton, "The Eskimo Art Collection of the Toronto Dominion Bank," exhibition pamphlet, Gallery of Modern Art, New York, 1967, pp. 2-3. 19 Taped interview between Natalie Ribkoff and Richard M. Thomson, 29 July 2004. Taped interview between Natalie Ribkoff, Patricia Feheley, and Budd Feheley, 10 August 2004 Internal Document: "The Toronto Dominion Bank Collection of Inuit Art Collection History." Contains summary of history of the Inuit art collection from 1965 to 1986. Patricia Feheley, date unknown.

20 Telephone conversation between Natalie Ribkoff and Jerry Twomey, 30 September 2004. 21 George Swinton, "The Eskimo Art Collection of the Toronto Dominion Bank," exhibition pamphlet Gallery of Modern Art, New York, 1967, p. 4. 22 Ibid., pp. 2-3. 23 The Smithsonian Institution circulated 90 carvings and 10 drawings between 1979 and 1981. The show travelled to 11 American cities and was viewed by over 50,000 people; it was accompanied by a catalogue, *By the Light of the Qulliq: Eskimo Life in the Canadian Arctic* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution, 1979). 24 Gallery of Modern Art, New York: 200 sculptures and prints, 30 April-28 May 1967. M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco: 236 works (108 sculptures, 128 prints), 10 March - 6 May 1973. National Arts Centre, Ottawa: 99 works (66 carvings, 33 prints), 19 October - 29 November 1976. 25 Taped interview between Natalie Ribkoff and Richard M. Thomson, 29 July 2004. 26 Ibid. 27 Ibid. The observation deck on the 55th floor flourished as a tourist attraction from 1967 until 1977. 28 In a letter dated 9 June 1977, David Garrick, Manager of Operations, CN Tower Ltd., expressed an interest in displaying the "magnificent Eskimo collection in the event that the Bank is unable to find a suitable location for it." 29 Rod McQueen, "Behind Closed Doors: Inside a Bank Board Meeting, Conclave of the Corporate Elite," *The Financial Post Magazine* 14:9 (1 September 1983). In return for building what they designated as a "viable tourist attraction," the City of Toronto modified the zoning for the tower and granted the developers permission to add an extra floor to the building. With the ability to generate revenue from this additional floor, the TD Centre agreed to cover the majority of the expenses associated with building the gallery. 30 The collection was condition-reported, restored, and re-catalogued. Further sculptures were de-accessioned and selective acquisitions were made to supplement the collection. 31 "Creation of a Gallery: A Study in Corporate Commitment to Art" *Business Quarterly* (Winter 1985/86), University of Western Ontario, School of Business Administration, London, Ontario, p. 11. 32 Ibid. 33 An in-house training program was offered to employees who were interested in volunteering to lead public tours of the Inuit Art Gallery. These tours were given from 1986 to 1993.