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## **(Post) Colonial Relations on Display**

*Contemporary Trends in Museums and Art Exhibitions depicting Greenland*

**Vanessa Brune**

*Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies  
May 2016*





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A Thesis submitted by:

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*Spring 2016*

Cover Page: Statue of Hans Egede, a Danish pastor who introduced the Christian mission and thereby colonisation to Greenland, overlooking the colonial harbour of Nuuk. Picture taken by Vanessa Brune.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank everyone I had the pleasure to meet and/or conduct interviews with during my fieldwork in Copenhagen and Nuuk. This thesis would not have been possible without all your valuable help, insight, information and recommendations and I am so grateful that you took the time to answer my questions.

In particular I want to thank:

MARTI and the Greenlandic House in Copenhagen

The National Museum of Denmark

The North Atlantic House in Copenhagen

The Photographic Centre in Copenhagen

The National Museum of Greenland

Nuuk Art Museum

The Project “Inuit Now”

Secondly, I would like to thank my supervisor Bjørn Ola Tafjord for always being supportive, for taking so much time to help and guide me, and of course for constantly pushing me to go the extra mile. I know it was worth it.

Also, thanks to the Centre of Sami Studies for the chance to conduct this study and for providing me with the opportunity to do research in Greenland.

Thank you to Hendrik Schade for being so kind to proof-read this thesis.

Thanks also to my fellow MIS students and friends for your input and for a lovely time spent together in and outside of class.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family for always being supportive. I will finally have more time for you when I visit now.

A special thanks goes to Simon for all your support; for keeping up with me even when I turned into a stress monster (I know, it must not have been easy), and for always being there when things seemed overwhelming. I am entirely grateful to have you in my life!



## **Abstract**

This study describes how Greenlandic culture is represented in the arts sector of Greenland and Denmark, and furthermore analyses the political processes that those representations relate to. Greenland has been talked about a lot recently in the discussions about climate change, and also in the light of a possible independency of the country in the future.

I therefore wanted to find out whether those debates are reflected in museums and art exhibitions depicting Greenland and if so, in what way. During the summer of 2015, I visited three museums and four art exhibitions in Nuuk and Copenhagen and analysed how they described Greenlandic culture.

I was left with three main discourses: One being the Greenlander as a hunter – historical colonial views as depicted today; another being the threatened Greenlander in times of climate change, and lastly, Greenlanders as modern people in a country on its way to independence.

I argue that the three trends I discovered, have their origin in different socioeconomic or political processes and that a majority of them can be described as having their origin in colonialism.





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# 1. Introduction

Greenland has been discussed and represented abroad in many different ways and discourses over time. While the country was a colony of Denmark from the 18<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Greenland was mainly talked about as being exotic and remote in the rest of Europe and Denmark especially. The traditional lifestyle of the Inuit was of particular interest of many people in Denmark and Greenlanders have been depicted as hunters covered in fur clothing ever since this time. Modernization made its way to Greenland long ago, though *Eskimo-Orientalism*<sup>1</sup> as the anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan has called the process of othering Greenlanders, has not really stopped yet (Dyrendom Graugaard 2009:3-4). Lately, the country has gained attention abroad mainly in the context of climate change and the melting of the Greenlandic ice sheet which many think will lead to the disappearance of traditional Inuit culture. Stories of hunters who get trapped out on the ice are being used as prominent examples of how climate change is destroying Greenland and threatening its inhabitants. In Denmark though, Greenland is mainly talked about in a political context as after gaining self-rule<sup>2</sup> in 2009, a possible independence of Greenland from Denmark could become reality. Many Danes are sceptical of this process however – in their opinion, Greenland never really was a colony and the relationship has always been friendly so why the need for independence? These discourses and opinions are wide-spread – in society and the media, for example, but also in museums and art exhibitions which will be the focus of this thesis. When I designed my research proposal, I intended to look into the relationship between Denmark and Greenland by analysing museum exhibitions as, surely, museums in Denmark must still represent the old stereotypes of the Greenlander as a hunter while Greenlandic institutions must provide a more updated and diverse point of view. When I went into the field in the summer of 2015 to actually analyse exhibitions however, I found themes in and processes behind those exhibits that were much more complex and diverse than I expected. Overall, I found three major themes in the depiction of Greenlandic culture in museums and art exhibitions. One was the depiction of Greenlanders as primitives as developed during colonial times. Another was the depiction of Greenlanders as threatened indigenous people due to climate change and finally, I found exhibitions focussing on Greenland as a modern country, ready to become independent.

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<sup>1</sup> The term was first coined by the anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan (1995) and later used by researchers like Lill Rastad Bjørst (2003) and Naja Dyrendom Graugaard (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Greenland achieved self-government in 2009 after a national referendum the year prior. The country now has the right to decide in all political matters except for international and security questions. These responsibilities are still represented through Denmark. I will come back to this topic at a later point.

In this thesis I will therefore present the exhibitions and three different themes in the depiction of Greenland and analyse the processes and structures that lie behind them. My aim is thus to present the view on Greenland as shown in the arts and culture sector of Greenland and Denmark in 2015 and trace some historical and political processes those views are entangled in. First however, I am going to present the methods I used and the theories that have been important for my research.

My fieldwork at museums in Copenhagen and Nuuk, was characterized by the following research questions:

- How is Greenlandic culture represented in museums in Denmark and Greenland? Do the exhibitions contain outdated views and/or common stereotypes about Greenlandic culture?
- What do visitors and staff members think about the exhibition? Does it match their expectations and do they have any suggestions on how it could be improved?
- In what ways do the exhibitions have an influence on how visitors might perceive Greenland?
- What do exhibitions say about what is happening in society in Greenland and Denmark? Is there a relation between the way Greenland is represented and political, social or environmental circumstances concerning Greenland?

I mainly wanted to focus on specific exhibitions in the different museums and temporary exhibitions in art and culture institutions. In other words, I wanted to get an overview of what is out there in the arts and culture scene in Copenhagen and Nuuk when it comes to the depiction of Greenland, and besides analysing permanent exhibitions at museums, I also wanted to look into temporary exhibitions in other institutions.

In the summer of 2015, I therefore spent three weeks in Copenhagen and one week in Nuuk and visited seven exhibitions/museums depicting Greenlandic culture. In Copenhagen I visited the National Museum of Denmark to have a look at their Greenland sections in the exhibitions “Jordens Folk” and “Etnografiske Skatkamre”. I also visited the Greenlandic House to see an exhibition called “Greenland Spirit”, and the North Atlantic House for an exhibit called “Red Snow”. Further data collection was done at the Photographic Centre where “Jette Bang i dialog” was exhibited at that time and Øksnehallen where the photographic project “Inuit Now” could be seen. In Nuuk, I visited the National Museum of Greenland and the Art Museum of Nuuk. I mainly collected qualitative data in the form of exhibit analysis, interviews and the analysis of exhibition brochures. At the National Museums of Denmark and Greenland, as well as at the Art Museum of Nuuk, I focused on those exhibitions that contained artefacts or art

from or about Greenland. The same goes for the exhibition “Red Snow” since this was an interdisciplinary project of artists from all over the Nordic countries.

During my fieldwork, I interviewed directors, curators and artists and also talked to visitors. I conducted a short interview with the curator Martin Appelt at the National Museum of Denmark, as well as Bo Albrechtsen, the director of the National Museum of Greenland, in Nuuk. I furthermore conducted an interview with MARTI, the artist behind “Greenland Spirit”, at the Greenlandic House and with Dennis Lehmann about his project “Inuit Now” via Skype. At the Art Museum of Nuuk, I also talked to its director Nivi Christensen and at the Photographic Centre in Copenhagen, I spoke to curator Kit Vatit Jensen about “Jette Bang i dialog”.

Talks to visitors at the different institutions were held anonymously and informally, and were furthermore kept short.<sup>3</sup> I asked people about their impression of the exhibition and about their view on Greenland and Inuit people and also asked some people about their prior knowledge on the country and about whether or not they learned something new about it during their visit to the museum or art institution. Overall, I talked to 12 visitors at the National Museum of Denmark, 4 visitors at the Greenlandic House, 2 visitors at the North Atlantic House, 6 visitors at the National Museum of Greenland and 4 visitors at the Art Museum of Nuuk. I unfortunately did not manage to talk to any visitors at “Inuit Now” or “Jette Bang i dialog”.

When talking to visitors, my main aim was to find out what impact the specific exhibition could have in society. When analysing the different exhibitions, I furthermore looked for clues of current political or social processes in the depiction of Greenland.

When it comes to the representation of Greenlandic culture in museums in general, a lot has been written and said already. The Danish eskimologist Lill Rastad Bjørst for example wrote about the National Museum of Denmark and its Greenland exhibitions in *En anden verden* (Rastad Bjørst 2008) and “Det Arktiske Dilemma” (Rastad Bjørst 2003). In the latter, she focuses on the National Museum of Denmark in particular and criticizes the museum’s sole focus on Greenland during colonial times and states that the past depicted there is romanticized so much that it even became exotic for Greenlanders themselves (Rastad Bjørst 2003:5).

Other museums have been written about too, for example the National Museum of Greenland or the Art Museum of Nuuk. The Danish archaeologist and curator Peter Pentz for

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<sup>3</sup> I did not collect any personal details of visitors, apart from their nationality, to make sure that they stay anonymous and of course presented myself and my research project and asked about their permission to ask them some questions, prior to interviewing them.

instance wrote about the repatriation of more than 35000 artefacts from the National Museum of Denmark to the National Museum of Greenland in “Return of the prodigal son – but is the seat taken?” and remarks that “objects returned are never quite the same objects as those that were taken” (Pentz 2008:36). Iben Mondrop Salto, a Greenlandic author and artist, then quotes her friend and colleague Julie Edel Hardenberg, also a Greenlandic artist, in “An appetite whetted”, saying that the Art Museum of Nuuk is not worth the visit and rather a waste of time (Salto and Hardenberg 2008:37).

Of course these works were very helpful for this thesis. However they focus on museums as institutions in general. In the following chapters, I will provide thorough descriptions of each exhibit, based on my own observations, before going on to analyse them. The analysis will be supported by exhibition brochures and/or information from the museum’s or art institution’s website, as well as interviews and talks with different staff members, artists and visitors and newspaper articles or research papers.

This approach was greatly inspired by the Canadian curator Ruth B. Phillips and her work *Museum Pieces – Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Phillips 2011) where she presents an outline of exhibitions on First Nations people in Canadian museums of the last few decades and their development processes, as well as their reception in the public. She presents a few of the most important problems when designing an exhibition about indigenous people – for instance, the expectation of scholars to provide a post-colonial and neutral representation of a people or their wish for the museum to hire indigenous consultants or instead of exhibiting the artefacts collected, rather repatriate them (Phillips 2011:17). In practice though, the indigenous consultant might have actually chosen a neo-colonial approach or the museums never actually received any requests for repatriation, as named as some of the problems by Phillips in the preface to her work (Phillips 2011:17). Phillips’s work helped me in developing the analytical tools I needed for my project. I do not have any experience of working in a museum so Phillips provided me with a few essential questions and concepts I needed to be able to analyse exhibitions. I furthermore adopted her approach of categorising each exhibit, before describing and analysing them in detail and later on, draw a parallel to socio-economic processes of the time when the exhibits were developed.

My work is furthermore inspired to a great part by the works of Paul Chaat Smith (Smith 2007) and James Clifford (Clifford 1997). The Native American curator Smith was involved in the establishment of the National Museum of the American Indian, which opened in 2004, and who tells the story of its development in “The Terrible Nearness of Distant Places: Making History at the National Museum of the American Indian” from his own point of view. In the

article, he includes several extracts from internal memos he sent to his colleagues in the time of developing the exhibitions. There he addressed several problems that he thought should be addressed in the new museum, for example a precise and factual history of Native Americans which up to that point was a problem rarely ever talked about in the US (Smith 2007:391-392). He furthermore questions the agenda of the museum to present “the Native Voice *unfiltered*” and asks which Natives were meant and who chose them? (Smith 2007:385).

Again, since I do not have any experience of working in a museum, a look behind the scenes of exhibition development was incredibly helpful to me. As I am not indigenous myself however, Smith’s piece was also vital to my work as it presents issues of exhibitions from an indigenous point of view. Upon writing my research proposal, I was more concerned about the fact that I am neither Danish nor Greenlandic and expected to have a difficult time in the field as an outsider. My main struggle in this project however was my lack of knowledge on museology, though Smith’s work helped me in asking the questions necessary to analyse my data to the point - his indigenous point of view on museology was helpful in particular.

Another author who helped me gain the knowledge in museology needed for this project is the historian James Clifford. His articles “Museums as Contact Zones” (Clifford 1997) and “Ishi’s Story” (Clifford 2013) helped me understand the function of museums and exhibitions as a mode of transportation – to (figuratively) travel into another country or culture or even time-travel into the past (cf. Clifford 1997:204). Museums and exhibitions are places where different cultural perspectives and perceptions encounter and oppose each other and instead of just being a place for education where universal culture is being presented, museums and exhibitions are more vital and instead serve as a site for the exchange of different views and the forming or change of an opinion.

Considering that Greenland nowadays is talked about more often internationally due to climate change but also *nationally* within Denmark due to its quest for independence, this aspect of museums and exhibitions as mediators between cultures and places where opinions are being formed is vital to the research design of my thesis. Greenland has become more known in the world due to these discourses, which makes the study of how the country is being represented in educational or cultural institutions even more important. By looking at what an exhibition says about the Greenlandic people, one can derive a lot about what is currently going on in society in regards to Greenland. This is what I will try to analyse in the following chapters. I will present the three different themes I found during fieldwork, starting with the representations of Greenlanders as hunters, or in other words historical colonial views as depicted today. This chapter will contain an analysis of exhibitions found at the National

Museums of Denmark and Greenland, as well as the Art Museum of Nuuk. I will then go on to write about climate change narratives in the context of the exhibitions “Greenland Spirit” and “Red Snow”. In the end, I will present the two exhibitions “Inuit Now” and “Jette Bang i dialog” and their depictions of Greenland as a modern country on its way to independence.



## 2. The Greenlander as a Hunter: Historical Colonial Views as depicted Today

By Southerners, Greenland and the Arctic in general, have been regarded as remote, cold and exotic all throughout history and the people living there have been seen, like most indigenous people in the world, as primitive or barbaric. Inuit in particular though, have mostly been seen as hunters and “eaters of raw meat” which is where they got the name “Eskimo” from – a name that has been given to the Inuit in Greenland by their rivalling tribes in Canada and North America and which is a term that is highly debated among Inuit around the North (Erpf 1977:89). While there are translations that say “Eskimo” means “those who speak a foreign country’s language”, there are also translations stating that the term means “those who make snowshoes” (Kleivan 2011:32-33). The indigenous people in the North of Canada, Alaska and Greenland though call themselves “Inuit” which can be translated with “human” (Regener 2006:212). The term “Eskimo”, according to the anthropologist Inge Kleivan, became widespread in Denmark through Kaj Birket-Smith’s book *Eskimoerne* from the year 1927 and the use of the term in *Den Store Danske Encyklopædi* (The Great Danish Encyclopaedia) (Kleivan 2011:32). The term also still is widespread in museums in Denmark, e.g. in the National Museum of the country, which I will come back to later on.

No matter which term was used to describe Greenlanders, the image that was drawn of them in history was mainly concerned with a primitive and barbaric lifestyle. This attitude prevailed until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Northerners were seen differently due to romanticism. Inuit then were regarded as “nature people” instead of barbarians who however still were primitive in contrast to Europeans or “culture people” (Høiris 2011:125-126). This primitivism however was what researchers of that time were looking for. During colonisation, Greenlanders became more and more Danicized which lead to Danes travelling to or living in Greenland being more or less upset about. The Danish priest Carl Emil Janssen for example complained about Greenlanders in Nuuk in 1847 after having lived in the smaller settlement of Sisimiut because:

(...); de boer i halvdanske Huse, gaar halvdansk klædte, driver ingen Jagt, Fangst og Fiskeri og fører saaledes et normeret, ordentligt, halvciviliseret Liv, hvilket jo alt sammen er meget vel og bravt, men dog - maaske feilagtigt - holder jeg mere af den frie, selvstændige og

dyktige Grønlænder, der paa sin ejendommelige, nationale Maade betvinger det vilde Hav og dets Beboere og jager Fjeldets Renner. (Høiris 2011:130)<sup>4</sup>

This romanticized attitude towards Greenlandic culture can also be found in the work of Knud Rasmussen, the great Danish polar explorer who, together with the later leading curator of the National Museum of Denmark, Kaj Birket-Smith, collected most of the artefacts that can be found at that same museum today (Høiris 2011:136-137). In fact, most of the Greenlandic artefacts that are on display in European museums today, have been collected until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which was when the attitude towards Greenlanders and other indigenous peoples began to change drastically (cf. Rastad Bjørst 2003:5). Since that is what many ethnographic museums have on display today, it is hardly surprising that the historical colonial views on Greenlanders as the hunter living in the hostile region of the Arctic still prevail.

Moreover, there might even be a strategy behind representing Greenlanders in a romanticized way. The media scholar Susanne Regener from the University of Siegen in Germany claims:

Andererseits dient das Image vom furred-stylish Eskimo besonders in Dänemark dazu, sich die sozialen und psycho-sozialen Probleme in der dänischen Bevölkerung auf Distanz zu halten, die Folgen der nationalen Kolonial-Politik sind. Distanz wahren kann man offenbar am besten, wenn man das Objekt in ein Traumbild einkleidet. (Regener 2006:211)<sup>5</sup>

To truly represent contemporary Greenland thus would entail to represent the problems in society that arose from colonialism – which of course is something that has to be admitted by the state first and something that is not easy to deal with. There seem to be many reasons though why Greenlanders are still represented as hunters of the old days in museums in Denmark and Greenland alike and I will try to find a relation between the representation of Greenlanders in this way and political, social, economic and museum trends in this chapter.

During June and July 2015, I visited the National Museum of Denmark, the National Museum of Greenland and the Art Museum of Nuuk and in all of them found representations of Greenlanders as hunters of the old days. I will describe and analyse the exhibitions I found in these museums in this chapter, display voices of curators, museum directors and visitors on

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<sup>4</sup> My translation: “they live in half-Danish houses, wear half-Danish clothes, do not go hunting and fishing, and live a normal, reputable, half-civilized life which in general is very well but still, and maybe wrongfully, I think better of the free, independent and diligent Greenlandic who on his own odd, national way overcomes the wild ocean and its inhabitants and who hunts the mountain’s reindeers.”

(All quotations in this thesis will remain in their original language to prevent the loss of meaning in translation)

<sup>5</sup> My translation: “Then again, the image of the furred-stylish Eskimo is useful, especially in Denmark, to hold the social and psycho-social problems in Danish society, which are consequences of the national colonial policy, at a distance. To do this, the easiest way obviously is to frame the object in a dream image.”

these exhibits and last but not least, try to demonstrate links to political, social or museum trends of the time of the creation of the different museums or exhibitions.

## **2.1 The National Museum of Denmark**

The National Museum of Denmark, situated in Copenhagen, is a museum of cultural history and apart from presenting the history of Denmark it also hosts ethnographic as well as archaeological items from Asia, Africa, North and South America, Oceania and the Arctic. It originates from “Det Kongelige Kunstkammer” (The Royal Art Chamber) which was developed by King Frederik III. in 1650 (Gilberg 1999:29). According to the former curator at the National Museum, Rolf Gilberg, there are about 1000 artefacts in the Ethnographic Collection that have already existed at “Det Kongelige Kunstkammer” (Gilberg 1999:30). In the 1820s though, a new museum was founded in Copenhagen: “Det Kongelige Kunstmuseum” (The Royal Museum of Arts), which inherited a great deal of the ethnographic artefacts of “Det Kongelige Kunstkammer” which closed down in 1828 (Gilberg 1999:30). When the art museum got a new director in 1839, the museum’s focus shifted. This new director, Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, believed that Denmark, as a seafaring nation and colonial power, needed to have a proper collection of artefacts from its colonies (Gilberg 1999:30). He therefore asked public servants in the colonies to send artefacts to Denmark, no matter their age or purpose, and as a result created the very first ethnographic museum in 1850 with the aim to show all non-European nations (Gilberg 1999:30-33). In 1892 this museum then became a part of the National Museum as we know it today, except of course that the exhibitions changed over time, especially in the Ethnographic Collection.

### **2.1.1 “Jordens Folk” and “Etnografiske Skatkamre”**

There are two exhibitions at the National Museum of Denmark today, in which items from Inuit regions, namely Greenland, Alaska, Siberia and Canada, can be found although the main focus of both exhibits is on Greenlandic culture. The first exhibition, found on the first floor of the National Museum, is called “Jordens Folk” (Peoples of the Earth) which presents different ethnic or indigenous groups around the globe, and the second exhibition, situated on the second floor, is called “Etnografiske Skatkamre” (Ethnographical Treasures) which show all kinds of historical artefacts from around the world.

The two exhibitions at the National Museum of Denmark that deal with Inuit culture are divided into smaller parts focussing on different geographical and/or cultural regions. The

parts with a focus on Inuit culture are also in itself divided into three different rooms with a different topic each. The Inuit part of “Jordens Folk” is divided into one room called “Greenland – the hunter’s skin boats”, another called “Eskimos, Art and Magic” and one called “Ancient Greenland”. The Inuit exhibition of “Etnografiske Skatkamre” also is divided into three parts, namely “Netsilit Eskimos”, “Eskimo Hunting” and “Clothing and dwellings”. To simplify the reading process though, I am going to only use the expressions “Jordens Folk” and “Etnografiske Skatkamre” in the following and refer thereby to the different rooms stated above.

Both exhibitions focus on traditional ways of living and subsistence. The items on display were mainly collected during colonisation and a great part of “Etnografiske Skatkamre” originates from Knud Rasmussen’s 5<sup>th</sup> Thule Expedition that took place between 1921 and 1924 (National Museum of Denmark 2015). “Jordens Folk” is displaying Greenlandic kayaks in one room with one big umiaq<sup>6</sup> standing on a glass panel in the centre, a smaller kayak on the wall and two movies showing Greenlandic life and the handling of kayaks on both ends of the room. The movies are actually the oldest ones depicting life in Greenland and have been shot by the linguist William Thalbitzer in East Greenland in 1914 (National Museum of Denmark 2016). In addition, there are two information signs telling about “The First Greenlandic Kajak” and “The East Greenlandic Women’s Boat”.

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<sup>6</sup> An umiaq is a bigger version of a kayak. Instead of having space for one or two people, an umiaq has space for the whole family and could be used as shelter during the annual journeys to and from the summer, respectively winter quarters.



*Figure 1 – Umiak presented on a glass case in room 170 of “Jordens Folk”<sup>7</sup>*



*Figure 2 – Scene from Thalbitzer’s movie as shown in room 170 of “Jordens Folk”. The scene shows an Inuit community at the coast during summer – children are playing in the foreground and men are carrying their kayaks in the back.*

The next room of the exhibit is displaying traditional objects from the different Inuit regions, for example drums, masks, drinking cups and water buckets. You can also find grave objects and a fur coat decorated with an amulet made of dead animals there.

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<sup>7</sup> All photos as published in this thesis were taken by me unless otherwise stated.

The last room of “Jordens Folk” is showing nine traditional fur and skin costumes in addition to basic traditional necessities such as water buckets, spears and spoons as well as jewellery. The room also hosts six small drawings, a piece of embroidery and three paintings showing Inuit hunters in traditional clothing – one of them is believed to be the oldest painting of Greenlanders existing and was brought to Denmark in 1654. The room is called “Ancient Greenland”, however it also displays a movie about the use of traditional blubber lamps made in Canada.



Figure 3 – “Painting of Poq and Qiperoq” by B. Grodtschilling from 1724

of Greenlanders existing and was brought to Denmark in 1654. The room is called “Ancient Greenland”, however it also displays a movie about the use of traditional blubber lamps made in Canada.

“Etnografiske Skatkamre” is set up after the “Wunderkammer” principle – display cases filled with artefacts showing several forms of one and the same: traditional costumes, spears, kayaks and so on. The heart of this exhibition is the room “Eskimo hunting” which shows ten kayaks, a lot of harpoons, spears and other hunting tools. The two rooms adjacent display Greenlandic national costumes and traditional Inuit clothing, everyday items such as knives, weapons and tools, as well as jewellery, drums and amulets. Most of these last mentioned items were collected by Knud Rasmussen on the 5<sup>th</sup> Thule Expedition among the

Netsilit Inuit of Canada.



*Figure 4 – On the left: Display case with household items from water buckets to ladles. In the middle: Display case with traditional Greenlandic costumes. On the right: Figures wearing traditional Greenlandic fur clothing.*

“Etnografiske Skatkamre” furthermore displays information on the items presented via small panels in Danish and English on the wall as well as in an electronic database.

### **2.1.2 A Culture of the Past**

In order to find out what influence the exhibitions have on visitors and what they think about Greenlandic culture, I talked to visitors and asked them about their impressions of the exhibits and Greenland. I also talked to the curator of the Ethnographic Collection at the National Museum, Martin Appelt, to get an insight into what the goals and motivations in setting up “Jordens Folk” and “Etnografiske Skatkamre” have been and which value the museum would ascribe to the forming of a public opinion about Inuit culture through its exhibitions.

“Jordens Folk” and “Etnografiske Skatkamre” have been created as part of a rebuilding of the National Museum between 1988 and 1992 (Gilberg 1999:51-52). The ethnographic exhibitions of the National Museum that were closed down in that period had been created by Kaj Birket-Smith in 1938 and thus were exhibited over the course of exactly 50 years (Gilberg 1999:51-52). It was therefore time for a change and the rebuilding of the museum in the late 1980s was a good opportunity to redo the exhibitions according to curator Martin Appelt. He also mentions that “... it was a possibility to experiment with new forms of dissemination, whether that be successful or not” and mentions that he views the exhibitions as outdated if looked at from a contemporary perspective. The division into an introductory overview on the first floor in “Jordens Folk” and a more in-depth exhibition with open storage rooms on the second floor in “Etnografiske Skatkamre”, would have been a good way of presenting, so Martin Appelt, if they had been paired with more information, for example by museum staff who work as interpreters between the exhibition and the visitor in the exhibition halls itself. The way information is given on the exhibition and the various exhibit items right now, through means of a database that Appelt describes as outdated, is according to the curator himself “more or less meaningless”. While fellow colleagues or scholars visiting the National Museum would be fascinated by the way the exhibitions of the Ethnographic Collection are done, probably because they already possess knowledge on the peoples presented, the other part of usual visitors of the National Museum would have difficulties in grasping the exhibitions fully. Due to the lack of information, anyone who does not possess a great deal or maybe even any

knowledge on what is presented, which might be the case for school classes and tourists who are regular visitors to the museum since it according to Appelt “is kind of the thing that you have to see when you are in Copenhagen anyway”, would not be able to understand the context of the exhibitions. These people furthermore mainly come for entertainment rather than information so the way Greenlanders are represented is even more influential in this case, as tourists are not actually searching for information or explanations but instead make up their minds by browsing through the exhibitions rather quickly. Martin Appelt however thinks that the National Museum does not really have any influence on visitors in this matter.

To find out if this is actually the case, I talked to twelve visitors from different countries and different age groups and asked them to tell me about their impressions of the exhibitions “Jordens Folk” and “Etnografiske Skatkamre” and of Greenlanders/Inuit. The first thing I noticed while doing this was that using the expression “Inuit” was more or less pointless. Since the National Museum uses the term “Eskimo” all throughout their exhibitions, people did not seem to understand what I meant by saying “Inuit”. Those having difficulties understanding the term “Inuit” however were also those stating that they have never heard about Inuit people at all or that they had only little knowledge on them prior to visiting the museum. This group (nine out of twelve persons) also mainly commented positively on the exhibitions while the group of people who stated that they had a prior interest and knowledge on Inuit (three out of twelve persons) expressed themselves more critically on the exhibits. People of this group mainly stated that they wanted more information on the different items presented. A few things they wondered were for example why there was a hole in the kayaker’s anoraks, how some of the items were found and what they were originally intended for or how items of clothing differed from one Inuit tribe to the next.

One visitor with a really strong interest in Greenland and archaeology for example stated that the exhibition is “fabulous in context but stinks in presentation”. This person also commented on the way, Inuit costumes are presented in “Etnografisk Skatkamre”. The costumes just stand on a rack - there is no puppet wearing them - and the hood of some costumes therefore is situated between the shoulders, creating the impression that Inuit are hunchbacks whereas in reality this hood was used by mothers to carry their baby. Another visitor with a background in archaeology, who also works at a museum, stated jokingly that he visited the National Museum to see how not to create a new exhibition. The visitor criticized the lack of information in “Jordens Folk” and said that less knowledgeable guests could not relate to the exhibition.



From what I have gathered at the National Museum, this might be true in a way. The main thing people who stated to only have very little or no prior knowledge on Inuit people, commented on, was the coldness of the region and how impressed they were that these people managed to survive in this rough climate. It seems to be a very one-sided impression of Greenland and the Arctic and one that might arouse from the lack of context. As the Danish anthropologist Lill Rastad Bjørst says: "... når alt er lagt op til egen fortolkning, er alt også lagt ud til egen misforståelse" (Rastad Bjørst 2003:21).<sup>8</sup> When being asked the question how they thought life looks like for Inuit today for example, some said that they simply do not know, one person asked whether or not there even are cities in Greenland and one said that Greenlanders now "are all going to McDonalds".

As Martin Appelt also said, both, "Jordens Folk" and "Etnografiske Skatkamre" would need to be equipped with more information in order for the less knowledgeable visitor to fully understand the exhibition. He however also says that the exhibitions for the visitor are "an opportunity to themselves figure out the differences and the likenesses" between the people portrayed and themselves which is something they would not necessarily need background information on. Of course, generally speaking, to set up an exhibition where the visitor himself has to try to find meaning in and learn from the exhibition without any help from the museum, makes it easier for the latter – both logistically and financially. And it moreover is a safe option as the museum that way prevents to say something wrong (cf. Rastad Bjørst 2003:20-21). For the National Museum of Denmark however to rather focus on artistic aspects instead of the transfer of information and knowledge is rather unfortunate. Lill Rastad Bjørst even goes as far as to say that "formen næsten overskygger indholdet i utstillingen" (Rastad Bjørst 2003:21).<sup>9</sup> And she also quotes the ethnologist and former curator at Grindsted-Vorbasse Museum, Anette Tonn-Petersen, who says about "Jordens Folk":

I monterne sidder teksterne med bittesmå hvide og gule bokstaver på en lille sort klods, fortrinsvis anbragt på steder, hvor de ikke kan læses – men det kan også være ligegyldigt, for teksterne er inderligt intetsigende. (Tonn-Petersen 1992:36, cited in: Rastad Bjørst 2003:21)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> My translation: "if everything is set up for one's own interpretation, everything is also set up for one's own misunderstanding."

<sup>9</sup> My translation: "the form almost overshadows the content in the exhibition"

<sup>10</sup> My translation: "In the display cases, texts are written in tiny white and yellow letters on a small black block, mainly put in places where they cannot be read – but that does not matter since the texts are completely meaningless anyway"

The smaller signs in “Jordens Folk”, those which can be found in the display cases, furthermore only contain information in Danish. One sign in the exhibition for example says:

Gravfund fra Ipiutak-kulturen. Alaska.

En forhistorisk kultur med påvirkning fra Sibirien og stærkt præget af kunst og magi. Point Hope. Ca. 300-900.

Grave objects<sup>11</sup>

The Non-Danish speaking visitor, who probably is an international tourist to Copenhagen and therefore probably already knows less about Inuit and/or Greenland than the Danish visitor, therefore cannot access the information on the grave objects. He might understand where they came from and how old they are but he probably does not understand anything that is written about Ipiutak culture. For Lill Rastad Bjørst, the exhibitions at the National Museum focus more on quantity than quality and according to her and Martin Appelt, the museum does not have the finances to change the exhibition at the moment (cf. Rastad Bjørst 2003:22).

In regards to the fact that what the National Museum originally has intended for its new exhibitions to be like and what the actual outcome was, this seems particularly unfortunate since plan and outcome seem to be two very different things here.

Rolf Gilberg, former curator at the National Museum, describes “Jordens Folk” in his history of the Ethnographic Collection of the National Museum as an “introduktionsudstilling” (introductory exhibition) for the visitor who either has little time or who does not want to focus on a certain subject in-depth (Gilberg 1999:53). “Etnografisk Skatkamre” however is for the visitor who does want to focus on a certain topic (Gilberg 1999:53). “Det er ikke meningen, at man skal se det hele, men at man finder det område, der har ens interesse” (Gilberg 1999:52).<sup>12</sup> The visitor therefore is supposed to get an introduction on the first floor in “Jordens Folk” and then choose the area of his interest to get a more in-depth overview on the second floor in “Etnografisk Skatkamre”. However, based on my own visit to the National Museum and visitor observations, this does not seem to be clear to anyone. Most people seem to, at least briefly, look at every exhibition and I had some difficulties, especially in “Jordens Folk”, to find people who were not rushing through the exhibit but seemed at least a bit interested. Also there is no plan or map of the National Museum that explains the visitor which exhibitions to look at first and neither are the different geographical and/or cultural areas of “Jordens Folk” and “Etnografisk Skatkamre” marked on the map. The different room numbers are marked there

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<sup>11</sup> Sign found in “Jorden Folk” at the National Museum of Denmark in June 2015

<sup>12</sup> My translation: “You are not supposed to see the whole exhibition, but rather find the area that is of your interest.”

but the plan lacks information on what the different rooms contain so it is up to the visitor himself to find the way to his areas of interest. There is not even a guide on the Ethnographic Collection. All I could find in June 2015 was a guide to the exhibitions on Danish prehistory, the fur trail and a guide for children. The Ethnographic Collection is mentioned on one page in a general guide to the National Museum which says:

Ethnographic Collection: Here you travel around the world in just one hour. Take a world tour and see magical amulets from Greenland, a Japanese Samurai costume and dramatic Indian goddesses. 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. <sup>13</sup>

According to this guide, you can see both, “Jordens Folk” and “Etnografiske Skatkamre” within one hour so the visitor is even advised to see the whole of both exhibitions.

It seems like Gilberg’s interpretation was what the museum had intended for its exhibitions but this plan did not seem to have worked out. Martin Appelt describes the exhibitions as “thought of as a whole” which contradicts Rolf Gilberg’s analysis. It was however written 16 years ago so clearly resembles how the museum’s original plans differ from how the exhibits are perceived today. Appelt also says that “the original intend would have been rather different from how we feel about this today”.

In the following subchapter I therefore want to examine the external influences as to why the National Museum of Denmark in the late 1980s decided to portray Inuit culture in the way it is presented in “Jordens Folk” and “Etnografiske Skatkamre” today – namely as a culture of the past.

### **2.1.3 Kaj Birket-Smith and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Colonialism**

“Jordens Folk” and “Etnografiske Skatkamre” have been set up in the period between 1988 and 1992 as the building that was hosting the National Museum of Denmark was being renovated (Gilberg 1999:52). The ethnographic exhibition that was on display until 1988 had been created by Kaj Birket-Smith, also during the course of a reorganization of the museum earlier (Gilberg 1999:40). Birket-Smith participated in Knud Rasmussen’s 5<sup>th</sup> Thule expedition and so it is hardly surprising that a great amount of the almost 20.000 items that were collected on this expedition, ended up on display at the National Museum (Gilberg 1999:38). The 5<sup>th</sup> Thule expedition took place between 1921 and 1924 and Birket-Smith’s exhibition was opened to the public in 1938 – a time where Greenland still was a colony of Denmark. The views on

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<sup>13</sup> “Nationalmuseet: The past awaits you”. Brochure found at Reception of the National Museum in June 2015.

Greenlanders that prevailed in that time are clearly different than what anthropologists and ethnographers think today – yet a lot of these historical colonial views can still be found at the Inuit exhibitions at the National Museum now. To understand why that is though, we have to go back in time a bit.

Inuit, as most indigenous people around the world, have been regarded as primitive and barbarian throughout history. This view prevailed well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even Kaj Birket-Smith expressed these colonial views when speaking about the Aborigines of Australia in 1940 (Høiris 2011:111). Birket-Smith also expressed negative thoughts about Greenlanders after his first visit to Greenland in 1912, before later on changing his mind after having been on the 5<sup>th</sup> Thule expedition (Høiris 2011:136-137). The anthropologist Ole Høiris explains Birket-Smith's change of mind as having to do with him living with colonized Greenlanders on his first expedition and living with largely un-colonized Greenlanders during the Thule expedition (Høiris 2011:137). His interest in the untouched Greenlandic culture also resembles the agenda of the National Museum of Denmark in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Med Nationalmuseets og det til Thalbitzer oprettede eskimologiske institut som dominerende i den danske grønlandskulturforskning blev den romantisk kulturopfattelse fastholdt til længe efter 2. Verdenskrig. Dette havde blandt andet som konsekvens, at målet med forskningen i Grønland ikke havde noget med den aktuelle situation at gøre, men var at rekonstruere den oprindelige, originale eskimoiske kultur, dens historiske oprindelse og tidligste historiske forløb og udbredelse, hvorfor hovedparten af den forskning, der foregik i Grønland, var arkæologisk. Samtidens levende kultur i Grønland blev anset for en uoriginal nærmest bastardagtig blanding, som ikke var en kulturhistorisk forskning værdig, hvad der blandt andet kom til udtryk på den måde, at dansk grønlandsforskningens ledende etnolog frem til 1963, Kaj Birket-Smith, ikke besøgte Grønland efter sin deltagelse i 5. Thuleekspedition. (Høiris 2011:141-142)<sup>14</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, one out of three rooms of "Etnografiske Skatkamre" solely focuses on Knud Rasmussen's Thule expedition and the other rooms, also the ones of "Jordens Folk", are highly archaeological in nature and do not show any contemporary artefacts. In fact, Lill Rastad Bjørst claims that a majority of all Greenlandic artefacts shown in museums around Europe

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<sup>14</sup> My translation: "With the dominance of the National Museum and the Eskimological institute, founded by Thalbitzer, in regards to Danish research on Greenlandic culture, the cultural understanding of romanticism was preserved until late after WWII. This had, among other things, as a consequence that the goal of research in Greenland did not have anything to do with the current situation but with the reconstruction of the original Eskimo culture, its historical origin and earliest course of events and expansion, which lead to most of the research performed in Greenland to being of archaeological origin. Contemporary living culture in Greenland was regarded as an unoriginal, almost bastard-like, mix which was not worthy of cultural-historical research. This, among others, can be seen in the fact that the leading Danish ethnologist up until 1963, Kaj Birket-Smith, did not visit Greenland again after his participation in the 5<sup>th</sup> Thule expedition."

were collected in a period between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and WWII (Rastad Bjørst 2003:5). And she goes on to say: “Min påstand er, at fortiden er blevet romantiseret og stereotypiseret så meget, at den i dag er lige så ‘eksotisk’ for grønlændere som for danskere” (Rastad Bjørst 2003:5).<sup>15</sup>

If a museum exhibits artefacts collected in a time where Greenland was still romanticized, Greenlanders seen as primitive and modern Greenlanders regarded as not worth researching, it is hardly surprising that non-knowledgeable guests adapt these stereotypes and/or completely misunderstand Greenlandic culture – particularly so when the exhibition is not equipped with any background information whatsoever.

There certainly was a good intention behind the creation of the new exhibitions of the National Museum in the 1990s. However the exhibition focusses on the past and as Lill Rastad Bjørst already mentioned, it is questionable whether that is a past that really existed that way or whether it is the past as Danish anthropologists imagine it to be. “Jordens Folk” and “Etnografiske Skatkamre” both exhibit artefacts that were collected in a time between the 17<sup>th</sup> century and 1940 – the collection of artefacts thus ended when Kaj Birket-Smith opened his exhibition and even though the exhibition changed in 1992, the artefacts did not (cf. Rastad Bjørst 2003:7). There are no artefacts or information on that time when Greenland became a part of Denmark nor from the time when Greenland became home-governed<sup>16</sup> (Rastad Bjørst 2003:7). In fact, the curator of the National Museum in 2003, Anne Bahnson, mentions in an interview with Lill Rastad Bjørst, that “havde vi haft dobbelt så mange rum, så havde vi vist Grønlands forhistorie også” (Rastad Bjørst 2003:7).<sup>17</sup> The National Museum thus still seems to have a great interest in the early (and supposedly original) Greenlandic culture but not too much in contemporary issues. Moreover, even though there were plans to create a room where the past and present of Greenland should meet with the help of new media such as videos and computers, these plans were overruled in the end as quantity in presenting the past clearly seemed more important than quality in presenting a nuanced discussion about old and modern Greenland (cf. Rastad Bjørst 2003:22).

To summarize, even though the exhibitions “Jordens Folk” and “Etnografiske Skatkamre” have been created in the late 1980s, the main external influence of that time was

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<sup>15</sup> My translation: “My claim is that the past has been romanticized and stereotyped so much that it today is as much ‘exotic’ for Greenlanders as it is for Danes.”

<sup>16</sup> Greenland was granted home-rule from Denmark in 1979. This means that the country established its own parliament which had the right to decide on matters such as culture, health and education while still being a part of the Danish kingdom. Since 2009 however, the country has a self-rule government.

<sup>17</sup> My translation: “if we have had twice as many rooms, we would also have shown Greenland’s pre-history”

the wish to create something of artistic nature. The fact that curators laid more weight on the creation of something aesthetically pleasing (i.e. an umiaq presented on a glass case) than on creating something informative, can surely be affiliated to trends in museum representation of the early 1990s (cf. Rastad Bjørst 2003:19). However the actual artefacts, what is presented in the exhibition and what the exhibition says about Greenland, are highly affiliated with views of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century since that was the time the artefacts were gathered and put on display for the first time. The historical colonial views of that time still prevail in the contemporary exhibition and even though one made use of modern ways to display and provide information about the artefacts, there is a clear relation between what anthropologists thought of Greenland in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and what the exhibition says about Greenland today.

## **2.2 Greenland National Museum & Archives**

The Greenland National Museum & Archives were established in the 1960s after a long planning process which already started in 1913 (Grønnow and Lund Jensen 2008:181-183). That year, the Council of South Greenland debated about Greenland's cultural heritage and expressed the wish for Greenlandic artefacts and archaeological items to stay in the country instead of being sent to Denmark (Grønnow and Lund Jensen 2008:181). According to the Danish archaeologist Peter Pentz, it was said at this meeting that: "Greenlanders have no other history than what was found in the graves, and it was important that the population had the opportunity to see the weapons and tools their ancestors had used" (Rosing 2004:31, cited in: Pentz 2008:34). Greenlandic culture did not develop an alphabet or writing – a written language was only introduced to the country during colonisation by Danish missionaries (Kjær Sørensen 2007:18-19). Therefore no written artefacts about life in Greenland in the past can be found which makes archaeological items even more valuable. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century however, a lot of items were excavated by Danish archaeologists and sent to the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen. The Council of South Greenland in 1913 wanted to secure the rights for excavation in Greenland and also wanted to set up a Greenlandic National Museum but their demands were not met (Grønnow and Lund Jensen 2008:181). The topic came up again in the 1950s and it was questioned why "the world's largest Inuit cultural-historical collection was in the National Museum of Denmark, with nothing in Greenland?" (Grønnow and Lund Jensen 2008:182). However only in 1967, a museum was created in Greenland's capital Nuuk, formerly called Godthaab (Rosing 2004:35). This museum was granted funding from the Danish government, the Greenlandic National Council and also of Godthaab Municipality

(Rosing 2004:35). 4 years later, in 1971, it then officially became the National Museum of Greenland (Rosing 2004:35).

With the introduction of Home Rule in Greenland however, the interest of Greenlanders in their cultural heritage grew (Rosing 2004:35). The National Museum of Greenland though, in contrast to its colleague in Denmark, did not have enough and adequate artefacts for a museum of this importance and therefore the wish for a repatriation of artefacts from Denmark to Greenland became loud (Grønnow and Lund Jensen 2008:183). The first 200 items were already repatriated in 1982 – watercolour paintings from Aron of Kangeq and Jens Kreutzmann<sup>18</sup>, though most items, about 35.000 to be precise, were sent back to Greenland between 1984 and 2001 (Grønnow and Lund Jensen 2008:183-185). In the meantime, in 1990, the National Museum of Greenland and the Greenland National Archives were merged to the “Greenland National Museum and Archives (GNA)” as it is called today (Rosing 2004:35).

### **2.2.1 Exhibitions on Inuit Culture**

The exhibitions at Greenland National Museum & Archives in Nuuk are situated in four buildings. The main building hosts exhibitions on Inuit culture while the surrounding buildings host a cooper’s work shop as well as one exhibition on Inuit transportation in Greenland and one exhibition focussing on the Vikings and Ancient People of Greenland. The exhibition on Inuit means of transportation as well as the exhibitions on Inuit culture in the main building will therefore build the base for the analysis in this chapter.

The exhibitions in the main building are divided as follows: one exhibition on lifestyle and class distinction of Greenlanders and Danes during colonialism as well as one exhibition on means of communication in Greenland during that time; one exhibition on the Thule culture, one on spirituality and funerals with the display of Greenlandic mummies and last but not least, one special exhibition which focused on the work of the anthropologists and archaeologists Robert Gessain and Eigil Knuth during the time of my visit to the museum in July 2015.

The main building exhibitions begin with class distinctions during colonialism and show for example a typical Danish versus a typical Greenlandic home at that time. This part also explains and shows Greenlandic costumes, describes the traditional Greenlandic diet and shows typical illnesses and health care of the old days.

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<sup>18</sup> Aron of Kangeq (1822-1869) was a Danish missionary and artist. Jens Kreutzmann (1828-1899) was a Danish-Greenlandic painter. (Information gathered from “Den Store Danske” at [www.denstoredanske.dk](http://www.denstoredanske.dk))

The special exhibition in the next room shows the black and white photographs of the anthropologist Robert Gessain and the sculptures of Greenlanders by the archaeologist Eigil Knuth. Further on, the exhibition about Thule culture explains the origins and lifestyle of the Thule people living in Greenland from about 1200 onwards. Costumes, tools and kayaks are shown to portray how the Thule people once lived.

The exhibition on Inuit culture continues in the next room with the display of 3 Greenlandic mummies and information on spirituality and grave goods.

To continue the round tour of the museum, you have to go back through the exhibits described above to the reception area and to the other part of the main building. There you can find the exhibition on means of communication which describes the Danish authorities in Greenland, the school and education system of the country, the introduction of new media such as newspapers, telegraph, radio and film to Greenland as well as Greenlandic art.

Last but not least, the exhibition on Inuit means of transportation in the adjacent building shows and explains how Inuit, in particular the Thule people, got around. Different types of kayaks, umiaqs and dog-sleds are shown in the exhibit, together with weapons and fur costumes.



*Figure 5 – Dogsled and figure wearing traditional fur clothing in exhibition no. 8 (Transportation) of Greenland National Museum & Archives*



Throughout all exhibitions at Greenland National Museum you can find information panels explaining you the artefacts on display, their history and what they were used for. All this information is available in Greenlandic and English. The visitor can get information in Danish, but more information is available in English, in the form of brochures at the reception.

### **2.2.2 The Creation of a Nation**

To find out more about the history of the Inuit exhibitions at Greenland National Museum, the goals and motivations behind and what visitors think of them, as well as to why there is no Danish information on the signs, I interviewed the co-director of the museum, Bo Albrechtsen in July 2015.

According to Albrechtsen, the museum started in the 1960s with the aim to preserve the old Greenlandic hunting culture as new technologies started to change the work of hunters and fishermen and one could see the old traditions disappearing more and more at that time. The exhibitions that are currently on display at Greenland National Museum though, have been created over the course of the last 10 years, Albrechtsen said. Although most of the items, minus the repatriated ones, are still the same that have been there when the museum was created in the 1960s, the exhibitions have changed completely throughout the years which also had to do with a change of buildings of the institution. The audience that is visiting Greenland National Museum is mainly school classes and other locals (with locals Albrechtsen means people living in Nuuk but also in the rest of Greenland), as well as international tourists, including Danes. So most people visiting are therefore Greenlanders or people living in Greenland as well as tourists from other countries. Since Danes for the museum are just part of tourists coming from outside, it makes sense that most information only is available in English and Greenlandic although considering that Danish is the second official language in the country, it could also be seen as a statement against colonialism and for an independent Greenland, although this would be highly speculative.

When being asked about the museum's main message though, Albrechtsen describes this as "the creation of a nation". He tells about how the exhibit on "means of communication" was called "kommunikation skaper folk" in Danish, meaning "communication creates a people". With the introduction of new technologies to Greenland, people were finally being able to communicate with each other, after decades of living in remote villages separated from one another during colonial times, which in turn led to the feeling of a shared identity among Greenlanders. So Greenland National Museum is in fact the National Museum of Greenland

and thereby represents the identity and history of a people and nation. Denmark is represented in the exhibits to portray colonial times but other than that, does not play a role in the museum anymore. Bo Albrechtsen reinforces this impression by emphasizing the fact that Greenland National Museum does not get any funding from Denmark and that it is an independent institution. He furthermore says that “we have a critical view on the time of colonisation here”, speaking for the museum itself.

With that in mind however, it then does not make sense that the museum misrepresents Greenland in the exhibition on lifestyle and class distinctions. There, two typical homes of Greenland in roughly the time between the 1920s and 1960s are portrayed, one Danish home and home Greenlandic home. The Danish home is a dining room with a set of chairs around a table which is decorated with a table cloth, candles and china. There is also a piano standing in the room. The Greenlandic home in contrast is a bedroom-kitchen combination with a bed covered with fur and posters of movie stars on the wall. There also is a stove in the room, clothes hanging from the ceiling above it and bowls of fish standing on the floor. The Greenlandic home seems to be a one bedroom apartment since the bed is standing next to the stove while the Danish home seems to be a larger house since the owner had enough space to have a dining area in a separate room.



*Figure 6 – On the left: Replica of a “typical Greenlandic” home – the bed stands next to the stove and kitchen area. On the right: Replica of a “typical Danish” home – a dining room with candles and nice tablecloth on the table*

Here the visitor easily gets the impression that Danes in Greenland have been wealthy while Greenlanders themselves were not. While that is not necessarily untrue, Bo Albrechtsen explained in the interview that the Danish home is actually set up of furniture that once

belonged to a wealthy Greenlandic family in the 1940s. Nonetheless it is used to portray “difference in the way people lived through times”, he said. What difference would it have made for the visitor though, if there were actually two Greenlandic homes compared with each other? Would people have gotten the impression that there were class distinctions among Greenlanders themselves too and not just between Danes and Greenlanders? And why would that be wrong?

Moreover, the story-telling of how Greenland became a nation starts in the 1960s, so very close to the introduction of Home Rule to the country. The exhibitions then go way back to ancient times and history clearly is the museum’s focus. The exhibitions are supposed to tell of Greenland and how the country became a nation. If people wanted to “experience the present, then it would be better for them to go out, to walk around in Nuuk and have a look at what it’s like today. But here in the museum we are going back into the past”, Albrechtsen said. Since the museum focusses on the past, Albrechtsen furthermore does not seem to see a direct influence of the exhibits on the audience.

Again, I spoke to visitors in Greenland National Museum and Archives and asked them about their impressions of Greenlandic culture. I only got to talk to 6 people – 2 Greenlanders and 4 tourists from France, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the US. The tourist from France told me that the visit to the Greenland National Museum was the first time for him to learn more about Greenlandic culture after already having travelled through the country for two weeks. So even after two weeks in the country, he still wanted to learn more about Greenland and “to go out, to walk around in Nuuk” as Albrechtsen suggested, did not seem to be enough for this tourist. He seemed very interested in the exhibitions but wished there was more information on particular artefacts and their use as well as on the process of mummification and the evolution of the different Greenlandic tribes.

Another tourist from the Netherlands commented that she wanted to see more about modern culture and said that a lot of Greenlandic culture seems to have gotten lost, comparing what is displayed in the exhibitions with what she could see in the streets of Nuuk. However this visitor also remarked that Greenland National Museum portrays Greenlandic culture as static or in other words as if the culture that is being portrayed does not exist anymore. It could therefore be a good idea if Greenland National Museum would also include modern elements of Greenlandic culture into their exhibition to make it easier for tourists to see how much of the old culture actually is still present.

This visitor furthermore sees a Danish dominance and Western point of view in the exhibitions which is interesting if you consider the use of the Greenlandic home being

portrayed as a Danish one and the focus of the museum on colonial times. Throughout the exhibition, Danish and Greenlandic culture are constantly being compared to each other. In the exhibit on lifestyle and class distinction for example, Greenlandic clothing, food, housing and the health of the people are being presented from the time before and after colonialism. Also the Danish information brochures on this exhibit make this comparison.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 7 – Photo Opportunity: Billboard of an Inuit in fur clothing with a face cut-out

So the critical view that Greenland National Museum has on colonialism is definitely thematised in the exhibition but might not be perceived by all visitors and it might also be weakened by certain elements in the exhibitions, for example a billboard of an Inuit in fur clothing with a face cut-out so that the visitor is able to take pictures of himself in fur clothing. To the western visitor, it might seem colonial and morally questionable if a European poses in Inuit fur clothing and this might be one of the reasons why this Dutch visitor perceived the museum as a Western one. However the local Greenlander might be able to connect with his ancestor's heritage through this billboard, since it is situated in the exhibition about Thule culture. Moreover it seems like this billboard is for children anyway since there is a play area right next to it. Since school classes are frequent visitors to the museum, Greenlandic children might learn a lot about their forefathers with this element of the exhibition and it therefore might be not be perceived in the same way as a European visitors might see it.

In general, it seems like the exhibitions at Greenland National Museum are perceived very differently by the various visitors. I also talked to two Greenlanders about their opinion of the exhibitions. They both were in their 20s and moved to Nuuk after having grown up in smaller towns in Greenland and they both expressed that they love the exhibitions at Greenland National Museum. One of them said that most people are not interested in culture and would rather sit in a café instead. This person definitely wished that more people would come to visit the museum and remarked that he is very interested in Inuit culture and still learns more about his own heritage. Therefore he visits the museum occasionally. The other Greenlander I spoke

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<sup>19</sup> Brochure: "Livsstil og classeskel – Inuits transportmidler". *Nunatta Katersugaasivia Allagaateqarfialu - Grønlands Nationalmuseum*. Found at the reception of Greenland National Museum in July 2015.

to was actually a member of staff and not a visitor per se. She however remarked that she likes the way Inuit culture is portrayed and that this is done in such a detailed way but would like to see more information on for example the Thule culture.

So all in all, Greenland National Museum has a focus on history, particularly colonialism and Thule culture. The exhibitions seem to be perceived differently by visitors with different backgrounds but they all portray one thing: the creation of a nation, namely Greenland.

### **2.2.3 Utimut - Return**

As already mentioned in the introduction to this subchapter, 35.000 items have been returned to Greenland, namely to Greenland National Museum & Archives, from the National Museum of Denmark between the 1980s and 2001. Greenland National Museum was created in the late 1960s and officially became the National Museum in the 1970s, a time in which voices concerning the future of the country were raised. Greenland wanted to establish Home Rule and thereby more power and influence in matters concerning the country itself.

Bjarne Grønnow and Einar Lund Jensen, both researchers at the National Museum of Denmark, write about that time:

In the 1970s, the younger generation of Greenlanders in particular demanded a change in Denmark's overall policy towards Greenland. Development in Greenland, they said, should be based on an acceptance of the Greenlandic population as a people with its own history and its own unique culture, and governed by the people of Greenland. The demand for self-government initiated a public and political debate in Greenland and Denmark that finally led to negotiations on the future relationship between the two countries. The result was an agreement on Greenland Home Rule, which was established in 1979. The Home Rule took over responsibility for cultural matters, including museums. (Grønnow and Lund Jensen 2008:181)

It thus was important for Greenlanders at that time to not only gain political power and acceptance but also to be able to portray themselves as a nation with its own history and culture, abroad and also at home in for example museums. The creation of a National Museum was therefore one of the milestones on the way to Home Rule. However, the museum that was created in the late 1960s lacked artefacts in order to truly be recognised as a National Museum (Grønnow and Lund Jensen 2008:183). It was already discussed in 1913 why the National Museum of Denmark hosts "the world's largest Inuit cultural-historical collection" while nothing was on display in Greenland itself (Grønnow and Lund Jensen 2008:181-182).

Therefore a committee consisting of three members of Greenland National Museum and three members of the National Museum of Denmark was created to organize the repatriation of artefacts from Denmark to Greenland (Rosing and Pentz 2004:24). Between 1984 and 2001 about 35.000 artefacts were returned to Greenland National Museum & Archives while 10.0000 remained at the National Museum of Denmark and there were exhibitions at both museums in 2001 to show the process of this repatriation (Rosing and Pentz 2004:24-25). The name of these exhibitions was “Utimut-Retur-Return” (Sandahl 2004:21). According to Jette Sandahl, Director of the National Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, Sweden, the word “utimut” has gotten several meanings in the museum setting, for example “return’, ‘to send back’, ‘to come home’, and/or ‘to make better’” (Sandahl 2004:21). The artefacts in question were certainly returned, sent back and came home but were things made better?

Of course, Greenland National Museum & Archives gained in importance and recognition, even more so for Nuuk and Greenland in general, and Denmark probably sees the repatriation as part of a compensation for the past but what about the artefacts themselves? The researcher Peter Pentz remarks that “objects returned are never quite the same objects as those that were taken” (Pentz 2008:36). Artefacts being sent from one institution to another might lose in meaning and context. While items could have been presented in one certain way at the sender’s institution, they might be presented in a completely different, maybe even opposite way, at the receiving end.

Furthermore, the artefacts that had originally been collected for the National Museum of Denmark were collected by Danish explorers and researchers who had a Western view on colonisation. The artefacts might still carry these views even though the new institution, Greenland National Museum & Archives, has a different view on that time. Also as already discussed in the chapter on the National Museum of Denmark, the items that are on display in both, the Danish and the Greenlandic National Museum, have been collected before colonisation came to an end.

Thus it is questionable in what way the repatriation of these artefacts actually contributed to an increased awareness of being Greenlandic and an increased feeling of a shared identity as Bo Albrechtsen called the result of the political circumstances leading to Home Rule in 1979. Greenlanders demanded to be recognized as a people with its own history and culture and thus wanted a National Museum. However to portray artefacts that have been sent from Denmark and that have been collected by Danish researchers during colonisation might not necessarily lead to a recognition in the way people had hoped for.

Peter Pentz actually says that “the returned artefacts were obviously not acting as ‘cultural catalysts’”, alluding to the reaction of what Pentz calls “the young generation” at a conference on the repatriation of cultural heritage which was hosted by Greenland National Museum & Archives in 2007 (Pentz 2008:35). The younger people did not seem to be too impressed by the return of the artefacts to Greenland and according to Pentz, the records accompanying the artefacts returned “might have important information on context and motives, but, as can be deduced from the meeting in February, they cannot in themselves reconnect present generations to those of the past” (Pentz 2008:35).

To sum up, the external influence in creating Greenland National Museum and its exhibitions on Inuit culture clearly was the wish for Home Rule and recognition as an independent nation with a particular history and culture. The exhibitions about Greenland that can be found at the museum today are furthermore influenced by the repatriation process of the National Museum of Denmark and thus, the artefacts themselves are influenced by this institution. Even though Greenland National Museum & Archives emphasized that it is an independent institution and that it has a critical view on colonisation, Denmark and its National Museum still play a role in Greenland’s National Museum, whether that be a small or big one, and which might be perceived even more so by European visitors.

### **2.3 Nuuk Art Museum**

Nuuk Art Museum was established in 2005 and originated in the private collection of paintings depicting Greenland belonging to the Danish entrepreneur Svend Junge. Junge came to Greenland in 1959 and worked in the oil industry, tourism and transportation<sup>20</sup>. Over the course of the years, he collected paintings of mainly the Danish artist Emanuel A. Petersen (1894-1948) who is known for his paintings of Greenland.

With the turn of the century, Junge wanted to give something back to the city of Nuuk and decided to donate his collection to the municipality so that an art museum could be opened. Originally, Junge intended for the new museum to be called “Greenland Art Museum”, however his collection does not represent a diverse and objective collection of Greenlandic art but rather Junge’s personal preferences (Christensen 2013:13). Apart from 300 paintings, the museum for example also owns 400 figures made of bone, soapstone or wood<sup>21</sup>. According to the director of Nuuk Art Museum, Nivi Christensen, it can be discussed whether bone figures

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<sup>20</sup> According to “Junge Fonden”: <http://jungefonden.gl/index.php/da/junge-fonden/svend-junge>

<sup>21</sup> Brochure: “NUUK Kunstmuseum – Fortids- og Nutidskunst”. Found at Nuuk Art Museum in July 2015.

really can be seen as Greenlandic art as they did not exist, at least not as individual figures but rather as decoration on other objects, prior to colonisation. Furthermore, Junge himself decided about the way his collection is exhibited at the museum so the museum has been seen as a private art collection instead of a proper art museum by many people over the last few years. Nonetheless, Junge also purchased paintings from younger artists, although these are stored in the archives, and cared for the museum to be able to purchase art after his death in 2007 (Christensen 2013:13).

Things at Nuuk Art Museum clearly start to change though as with the introduction of Nivi Christensen as the new director of the museum in 2015, someone with an academic background in art history has taken the lead in the institution for the first time. According to her plans, we can see more contemporary Greenlandic art and changing exhibitions at Nuuk Art Museum in the future.

### **2.3.1 The Living Room of Svend Junge**

Nuuk Art Museum was established in 2005 in the building of the old Adventist church in town which was later extended by Junge to host temporary exhibitions and an atelier for local artists (Christensen 2013:12). The museum overall has about 400 square meters of space for about 400 sculptures and 300 paintings, of which about half are from Emanuel A. Petersen<sup>22</sup>. As mentioned earlier, it was Junge himself who was responsible for the set-up of his paintings and sculptures at the museum and the way he arranged the artefacts had not been changed until my visit to the museum in July 2015.

Junge basically chose a sort of “living room style”<sup>23</sup> to display his paintings and sculptures which represents his personal taste rather than any rules or trends of curating. This means that practically every inch of the walls in the exhibition rooms is filled out, even the walls in the entrance and reception area, as well as the walls in hallways in between exhibition rooms. The exhibition rooms are situated on three different floors which follow certain themes. The first exhibition floor shows paintings of Emanuel A. Petersen, as well as sculptures made of bone, tree and soapstone. The second exhibition floor downstairs is showing more sculptures but also Greenlandic national costumes and figures and paintings of artists like Jens Erik Carl Rasmussen, Kristian Fly, Aage Berthelsen and Luplau Jansen<sup>24</sup>. During my visit, the museum

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<sup>22</sup> Nuuk Kunstmuseum: “Kunstkatalog”. Purchased in July 2015. p. 2

<sup>23</sup> Talk with Nivi Christensen. 22nd July 2015.

<sup>24</sup> The Dane Jens Erik Carl Rasmussen (1841-1893) focused on life and nature in Greenland. Kristian Fly is a contemporary Greenlandic artist focussing on handicraft. The Danish painter Aage Berthelsen (1873-1945) was



was in the process of remodelling as it had gotten a new director, Nivi Christensen, about 2 months prior. One of the rooms on this floor therefore had been newly installed with more contemporary art of local Greenlandic artists, for example graphics made of students at the Art School of Greenland. The third exhibition floor which is situated upstairs, is hosting paintings by for example Christine Deichmann and Harald Moltke<sup>25</sup>. It also hosts an actual living room to honour Svend Junge. This room is furnished with a sofa and TV and on the walls you can find different kinds of certificates and tributes Junge has received in his lifetime. Last but not least, this exhibition floor also hosts Junge’s stamp collection.



*Figure 8 – The reception area of the museum with Junge’s collection in the background*

Nuuk Art Museum also has space for temporary exhibitions, situated in an open two-storey room on the same floor as the reception area. At the time of my visit Bolatta Silis-Høegh’s “Lights On, Lights Off” was exhibited there. The Greenlandic-Latvian artist created this exhibition in 2014 as a response to uranium mining becoming a reality in Greenland. Her work includes paintings like “Uranophobia” (a self-portrait with the artist bleeding out of her nose),

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most known for his pictures of the famous “Denmark Expedition” to Greenland between 1906 and 1908. Last but not least, the Dane Luplau Jansen (1869-1927) travelled to Greenland in 1925 and depicted the life of Greenlanders in his paintings. (Information gathered from: Nuuk Kunstmuseum: “Kunstkatalog”)

<sup>25</sup> The Danish artist Christine Deichmann (1869-1945) lived in Greenland for about 10 years and depicted the life of women and children at that time. Harald Moltke (1871-1960) participated in expeditions to Greenland in 1898 and 1902. (Information gathered from: Nuuk Kunstmuseum: “Kunstkatalog”)

as well as “Outside” (a naked woman’s body with a bloody horse head) and “Inside” (woman with bleeding guts).

### **2.3.2 Representation of Greenlandic Art or Private Collection?**

Nuuk Art Museum is as such not a museum but a private art collection. It does not represent Greenlandic art but rather art depicting Greenland or what outsiders might connect with the country. Therefore the museum is perceived very differently by tourists and artists or curators. While I talked to tourists who loved the museum and what it presented, artists like Julie Edel Hardenberg for example do not think the museum is worth a visit (Salto and Hardenberg 2008:37). Hardenberg, known for example for her work *Den Stille Mangfoldighed* (The Quiet Diversity) in which she portrays various sides of Greenland not typically portrayed, said about Nuuk Art Museum in a talk with fellow artist and author Iben Mondrop Salto in 2007:

‘Traditional stuff...there is not one contemporary artwork amongst them with something to say’, Julie remarks, irritably. She continues, ‘The worst is that they have chosen to call it an art museum instead of a collection. So people think wrongly that what they see there is representative of Greenland art.’

‘But isn’t the collection representative?’ I can’t stop myself asking. Julie sighs. ‘Yes it is, unfortunately. But it represents first of all the entrepreneur’s own interests and taste because it is his collection. They should have called it ‘Junge’s Collection’, that would have been more accurate.’ (Salto and Hardenberg 2008:37-38)

The problem with Greenlandic art (or indigenous art in general) is that there are many expectations from outside as to how it should look like. Basically, many people do not perceive art as Greenlandic if it does not show elements that have a clear connection to the country, for example icebergs, polar bears or kayaks. A contemporary work from a Greenlandic artist that does not show typical Greenlandic elements at all, therefore often is not even perceived as Greenlandic art. Iben Mondrop Salto explains that due to the Greenlandic population being so small, Greenlandic artists need to play a part in contributing to hold Greenlandic traditions alive as well as legitimate that Greenlanders are indigenous people and that therefore their culture needs to be protected – at least that is what the old Home Rule Government wanted artists to do (Salto and Hardenberg 2008:38).

Artists in Greenland are therefore committed to showing and representing Greenland culture as something particular and different. That is one of their major responsibilities. And Greenlandic artists are good at it. They have an endless source in the landscape and in mythology. And they speak to an attentive audience. Both the nature and the mythology are

favoured themes for the more “civilized” cultures that look back with nostalgia at their own lost origins. (Salto and Hardenberg 2008:38)

The Greenlander as a hunter, the traditional and stereotypic image that many people often connect with Greenlanders, is definitely well visible in the exhibitions at Nuuk Art Museum. The Danish painter Harald Moltke for example painted Greenlanders in fur costumes with spears in their hands, as well as Greenlanders killing a polar bear, and both paintings are part of Junge’s collection at Nuuk Art Museum.



Figure 9 – On the left: “Traveling Polar Eskimos” by Harald Moltke. On the right: Painting by Harald Moltke, title unknown.

Also Søren Nielsen<sup>26</sup> portrays what can be perceived as the “Noble Savage” – a long-haired Greenlander with an amulet strap on an otherwise naked chest (Nuuk Kunstmuseum 2005:19). Kristian Fly then again combines the traditional with the modern and shows soap stone figures of occupational fields in Greenland then and now (Nuuk Kunstmuseum 2005:22).

Furthermore, Emanuel A. Petersen, whose paintings represent about half of all the paintings in the collection, focusses on Greenlandic landscapes and nature and features fjords, mountains and icebergs in his work – exactly what makes many people think of Greenland. When it comes to Greenlandic mythology, that too is represented at Nuuk Art Museum through various soap stone, bone and tree figures, for example “Aanngajatsivaq” – a skeleton figure telling the story of how two friends agreed to meet after death to continue what they loved doing: dancing (Nuuk Kunstmuseum 2005:9).

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<sup>26</sup> Came to Greenland as a sailor in 1894. Birthday and day of death are unknown. (Information gathered from: Nuuk Kunstmuseum: “Kunstkatalog”)

While Nuuk Art Museum mainly depicts paintings showing what can be considered as Danish colonial views of the country, the new exhibition rooms also host contemporary and more critical art, for example Bolatta Silis Høegh's "Lights On, Lights Off". However in the end, the exhibition still mainly consists of Svend Junge's favourite pictures which also mainly are from Danish artists and depict beautiful Greenlandic landscapes with people living in remote villages and hunting for subsistence. This was Junge's angle on the country as he himself was a foreigner arriving and falling in love with Greenland<sup>27</sup>. Even though the museum therefore is not representative of Greenlandic art, it might be perceived as such by tourists who do not know better. I asked the current director of Nuuk Art Museum, Nivi Christensen, whether or not she would say that the museum has an influence as to how visitors might perceive Greenland and she said that it does. According to Christensen, there is no other place that shows Greenlandic culture in general. Greenland National Museum & Archives would be perceived as solely depicting history, so that is not a place where tourists can inform themselves about contemporary Greenland either. Christensen admits that the museum is not "a proper representation of Greenlandic art" but rather depicts "the collector's angle". Nonetheless the museum has an influence as to how visitors perceive the country and Christensen thinks that the artefacts, as they for the most part only depict the exotic and traditional images Salto talked about, convey that Greenlanders are more Inuit than they actually are. According to Christensen, Greenlanders are not as aboriginal as the artefacts might tell, not anymore at least. However it is what people expect to see when they visit the museum and therefore the exhibition might reinforce people's pre-assumptions, Christensen said.

To find out what tourists are actually thinking of the museum, I asked 6 people (2 individuals and 2 couples) about their opinion. Everyone I talked with was of Scandinavian / Northern European origin. One visitor told me about Nuuk Art Museum that it portrayed all the art s/he was presuming to find and it therefore was exactly what s/he expected. The visitor also liked how Greenlandic culture was something very special and different and that Greenlanders, like Sami people, were very close to nature. A couple from Denmark told me that they do not know a lot about art but instead quite a bit about history and the history of Greenland in particular as they had been to Greenland National Museum & Archives prior to visiting Nuuk Art Museum. They said it was hard to separate the art from history after having been to Greenland National Museum and that they saw that most paintings do not represent Greenlandic but rather Danish views. These visitors also said that they found the exhibition of

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<sup>27</sup> Talk with Nivi Christensen. 22nd July 2015.

Bolatta Silis Høegh very interesting. Another Northern European couple told me that they found the mix of Greenlandic traditions and Danish romanticism interesting but think that it must be difficult for modern Greenlandic artists to try to establish their own ideas. Furthermore, whereas one of the partners lived in Greenland for several years, the other said that he only observed Greenlandic culture from afar but can see that the old traditions and the sense of community are still alive in the country. Last but not least, another visitor from Denmark said that it is nice to see modern art mixed with traditional art at Nuuk Art Museum although s/he had not seen much Greenlandic art before. This visitor also thought that there was too little space for all the paintings.

These opinions show that there is a wish for tourists to see the traditional side of Greenland but they are also clearly interested in modern culture and art and seem to enjoy the combination of Junge's collection with contemporary art in the changing exhibition's room for the most part. The way the museum was set up at the time of my visit, mainly showing Junge's collection but more and more including contemporary and non-traditional Greenlandic art by local artists, can be described as both, a private art collection and a representation of Greenlandic art. A distinction between the two however is hardly existent as part of the contemporary art is exhibited in what otherwise is art from Junge's collection and only the changing exhibitions are situated in another area. Thus, what led to the arrangement of the artefacts at Nuuk Art Museum in that way and what has been its background, as well as what will be its future, will be topic of the next section.

### **2.3.3 Expectations and Restrictions**

Nuuk Art Museum, as opposed to the National Museum of Denmark and Greenland National Museum & Archives, is a local museum and therefore unlike the others not influenced by national events but rather by local politics and people. Its aim is not to portray a whole nation and even though its name leads one to believe its aim is to represent Greenlandic art as a whole, that is not the case. Nuuk Art Museum instead shows the private collection of Svend Junge and in addition provides a space for local artists to establish themselves in the Greenlandic art scene by exhibiting their works at the museum. However what the museum represents today and what Junge wanted it to be are completely different.

Not only did Junge plan for the museum to be named "Greenland Art Museum" which would have implied a representation of Greenlandic art, something that Junge's collection is

not, but he also wanted it to be like Louisiana Museum of Modern Art nearby Helsingør in Denmark (Christensen 2013:12-13).

Ambitionerne for museet fremsagt af Junge selv var tårnhøje. Han sagde i sin åbningstale: ‘Min drøm er at skabe et grønlandsk sidestykke [...] til det danske museum for moderne kunst Louisiana i Nordsjælland...’ I dagligt tale kaldes museet Junges Kunstmuseum, og et enkelt blik på hjemmesiden giver da også et godt billede af, at det aldrig blev så ekstraordinært. Selv om mange var glade for opførslen af museet, var der også en del skepsis at mærke. En del var nervøse, fordi Junge i begyndelsen mente, at museet skulle hedde Grønlands Kunstmuseum. Et navn mange mente krævede en objektivitet og en bredere og mere repræsentativ samling af grønlandske værker end Junges privatsamling. Specielt i forhold til nyere grønlandsk kunst mente mange, at samlingen var mangelfuld. (Christensen 2013:12-13)<sup>28</sup>

It was Junge himself who decided how his art had to be placed, Christensen told me. Junge, as an entrepreneur, however did not possess any curating skills and until 2015 when Christensen, educated in art history, took over as the director of the museum, no one else working there ever had a background in art studies. In fact, after Junge’s death in 2007, the new director of the art museum was an archaeologist (Salto and Hardenberg 2007:40).

It goes without saying that a museum with this kind of management in its early years had a difficult time making a name for itself in the art scene and hence received a lot of criticism. Also Junge’s collection does in fact not represent modern Greenlandic art at all. About half of the paintings he collected are from Emanuel A. Petersen – a Dane who travelled to Greenland in the 1920s to late 1940s when Greenland still was a colony of Denmark (Trondhjem 2007:72). His views on the country therefore represent what many Danes at that time thought of Greenland – a romanticised view of the landscape and its inhabitants, also portrayed as “Noble Savages” in Petersen’s work. In fact, romanticism seems to be the main topic of Junge’s collection which is not surprising considering that Junge came to Greenland in the 1960s when Home Rule hadn’t been introduced yet and the country still was governed from Denmark. Not only Petersen’s paintings suggest this but also the many soap stone figures that Junge has collected. According to Nivi Christensen, these figures did not exist until

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<sup>28</sup> My translation: “The ambitions for the museum, uttered by Junge himself, were sky high. In his opening speech he said: ‘My dream is to create a Greenlandic equivalent [...] for the Danish Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Nordsjælland...’ In everyday speech, the museum is called Junge’s Art Museum and a simple look on the website also gives a good picture of that it never became so extraordinary. Even if a lot of people were happy for the creation of the museum, you could also notice some scepticism. Some people were nervous because Junge at the beginning wanted the museum to be called Greenland Art Museum. A name, many thought demanded objectivity and a broader and more representative collection of Greenlandic works than Junge’s private collection. Especially when it comes to newer Greenlandic art, many thought that the collection was deficient.”

colonisation. Before, they were used to decorate necessities, for example spears, as people believed that having an ornamented spear would bring greater luck on the hunt. Only later when Danes started to settle the country, people started to produce these figures separately to sell them, as Christensen told me. So even though Junge wanted his museum to be like Louisiana Museum of Modern Art and even though Nuuk Art Museum uses the subheading “past and present art” in his brochures and catalogues, the museum still mainly focusses on traditional Greenlandic art (cf. Trondhjem 2007:106). With a new staff educated in art history and plans to exhibit more contemporary art from local artists, this might change. Nonetheless Nuuk Art Museum will probably not get the status of a national art museum in the future either. As Christensen said, even though Junge is no longer alive and his family does not manage the museum anymore, when the museum was handed over to Nuuk municipality after Junge’s death, a lot of restrictions as to how the collection should be handled followed along (Christensen 2013:13). This means that even though the new management tries to exhibit more contemporary art and the museum has funding to buy new artworks, the overall structure of the museum cannot be touched. Therefore, if the Greenlandic government wants for a national art museum to be established in the future, a new institution would have to be created and a new museum would have to be built. Plans for this have already been made by local artists such as Jens Rosing and Bodil Kaalund and even Prince Henrik of Denmark (husband of Queen Margrethe II. – reigning monarch of Denmark) supports the idea of establishing a National Gallery of Greenland (Trondhjem 2007:107). This gallery, which has been planned since 2004, is supposed to exhibit Greenlandic art from its early stages until today, as well as art from other circumpolar areas (Christensen 2013:4-6).

Time will tell what this gallery will be like in the end and what its creation will mean for Nuuk Art Museum. What Junge had expected for his own museum to be though, did not become reality and it is questionable whether it will ever pursue the route to become a national or modern art museum. The fact that Junge forwarded restrictions to Nuuk municipality as to how the museum should be like after his death, makes it rather unlikely that the museum will host a representative exhibition of Greenlandic art in the near future. The exhibition as it is now is clearly biased on Junge’s own perceptions of the country and not even the changing contemporary exhibitions can change this impression.

Whether or not the new National Gallery of Greenland makes a better effort in shifting from portraying the Greenlander as a hunter and other presuppositions to more modern and critical perceptions of the country is uncertain. As of autumn 2015, the building process has not started yet and the fond “Grønlands Nationalgalleri for Kunst” still seems to be in the phase

of collecting funding<sup>29</sup>. It is to hope therefore that Nuuk Art Museum, despite Junge's restrictions for it, gets the chance to invite more artists like Bolatta Silis-Høegh and exhibit more modern art that question or oppose old stereotypes.

## 2.4 Aesthetics of Primitivism

The National Museum of Denmark, Greenland National Museum & Archives, and Nuuk Art Museum – what do these institutions have in common now?

The National Museum of Denmark, presenting its own history but also the culture of many other countries around the globe, decided to focus on the time of Knud Rasmussen's 5<sup>th</sup> Thule expedition in its Greenland exhibitions, creating the impression that not much has changed in the country since then. Surely, the way Greenland is represented in the exhibition can be described as somehow historically accurate – historically meaning for the time when the country still was a colony of Denmark. During that time, depictions of the Greenlander as Noble Savage prevailed and as the anthropologist Ole Høiris and the historian Ole Marquardt say in the preface to *Fra Vild Til Verdensborger* (From Wild to World Citizen):

Det, som de første kolonisatorer var usikre på, var ikke, om de var vilde, men om grønlandere var fredelige eller krigeriske vilde, ædle vilde eller dyriske vilde. Generelt for europæernes syn på grønlanderne i kolonitiden er, at de opfattede dem som et såvel åndeligt som kulturelt tilbagestående folk, der levede på menneskehedens barndoms niveau. (...) Denne kategorisering trængte dybt ind i den grønlandske selvbevidsthed, undertiden som accepteret og undertiden som det, man reagerede imod på forskellig vis. (Høiris and Marquardt 2011:10-11)<sup>30</sup>

As analysed earlier, the exhibitions on Greenlandic culture at the National Museum of Denmark present Greenlanders in pretty much this way – as noble savages, primitive and underdeveloped. The museum's descriptions centre around historical accounts of explorers like Thalbitzer and Rasmussen, but do not tell anything about the time after 1953 when Greenland officially got its colonial status removed. This is particularly interesting given the fact that even though most of the artefacts on display were collected during colonial times, the exhibition

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<sup>29</sup> Fonden Grønlands Nationalgalleri for Kunst: "Årsrapport 2012" (2015, October 23) [online]. –URL: <http://www.natgal.gl/wp-content/uploads/aarsrapport2012.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> My translation: "What the first colonizers were unsure about was not whether or not they were wild, but whether Greenlanders were peaceful or warlike wilds; noble savages or animal savages. The general European view on Greenlanders during colonisation was that they perceived them as both, spiritual and cultural underdeveloped people, that lived on the level of human childhood. This categorisation forced itself deep into the Greenlandic self-consciousness, at times accepted and at times as something one reacted against in different manners."



itself was remodelled in the 1990s. At that time, Greenland had its Home Government for nearly 10 years but still, the museum chose not to acknowledge that fact and rather continued to focus on the image of the country when it was still under the control from Denmark. At the same time the National Museum of Denmark was remodelled though the Portland Museum of Art in the US planned to remodel its Northwest Coast Indian collection, which also included a great deal of artefacts collected by Knud Rasmussen.

The museum's Rasmussen Collection was amassed in the 1920s in southern Alaska and along the coast of Canada. Long displayed in a drab, somewhat "ethnographic" manner, it was overdue for reinstallation. The director of the Portland Art Institute, Dan Monroe, who had worked with native tribes in Alaska, took the unusual step of inviting a representative group of Tlingit authorities, prominent elders from important clans, to participate in planning discussions. (Clifford 1997:188)

Even though the exhibitions at the National Museum of Denmark could be described in exactly the same way, one chose not to involve a Greenlandic point of view in the new exhibition and rather, instead of focussing on content and what is actually said about Greenlanders, to create exhibitions that would be modern and artistic and that would show an umiaq on a glass case and several hundreds of other artefacts on shelves, but that would tell very little about Greenlanders themselves. The Tlingit representatives that were invited to the Portland Museum of Art demanded "a kind of reciprocity (...), a coming together that would erase the discrepancies, the ongoing power imbalances of contact relations" (Clifford 1997:193). An acknowledgement of the past was also what the Comanche curator Paul Chaat Smith demanded for the National Museum of the American Indian in 2001: "There has to be a substantial piece of the museum devoted to the disaster of contact. Not guilt trips, not just first-person accounts, but a factual, narrative overview" (Smith 2007:386). What the Portland Museum of Art and the National Museum of the American Indian wanted to create with their exhibitions was some sort of contact zone – a space where the past and present encounter each other and where distant cultures and/or geographical locations come closer and can be understood (cf. Clifford 1997:192). At the National Museum of Denmark, however, the disaster of contact and the importance of contact zones do not seem to play a very big role as by having a look at its Inuit exhibitions, one could get the impression that it still is the year 1920. For the National Museum of the country to completely ignore one of the most important periods of Danish history, which the colonisation of Greenland can certainly be described as, is almost absurd. Even further though, instead of letting the artefacts talk, they have been transformed into art by creating exhibitions based on aesthetical rather than historical and ethnographical principles. As

Clifford describes the Tlingit: “It was clear that from the elders’ viewpoint the collected objects were not primarily ‘art’. They were referred to as ‘records’, ‘history’, and ‘law’, inseparable from myths and stories expressing ongoing moral lessons with current political force” (Clifford 1997:191). In the contact zone of the Portland Museum of Art, these artefacts got the chance to tell of those myths and stories while the artefacts at the National Museum of Denmark were left in stylish glass cases for the visitor to admire rather than to understand.

Now art is a wide term and can describe anything and nothing. The discussion about what Greenlandic or Inuit art is, likewise:

Straks vil man så spørge: Men hvad er kunst? Er det kunst at pynte sin dragt og sine redskaber? At udskære små figurer til amuletter som beskyttelse, er det bevidst kunst? Det skal indrømmes, at grænserne er flydende mellem kunst og kunsthåndværk, og ligeledes mellem individuelle kunstværker og de magiske figurer, som har et påbudt udseende. Alligevel vil jeg svare, ja, det er kunst. Det betagende ved den eskimoiske kunst er netop, at den har sit udspring i et hårdt og nøjsomt liv, ofte på kanten af eksistensgrænsen – at det har været nødvendigt at udforme sine redskaber med stor sikkerhed og artistisk kunnen, og ligeså nødvendigt at skabe billedlige udtryk for åndelige begreber. Også det faktum, at de små figurer udstråler livsvilje og livskraft, er for mig beviset på, at kunst opstår af nødvendighed. (Kaalund 1990:16)<sup>31</sup>

According to Bodil Kaalund, a Danish artist, Greenlandic art can be found everywhere - in tools and handicraft, amulets and clothes. However, the Greenlandic language does not really have a word for art and as mentioned earlier, the Inuit do not regard their material culture as such. As the Greenlandic artist Pia Arke says about Kaalund’s work:

(...) originally, the Eskimo vocabulary contained no word for art. Only after pressure from the European scheme of things did the Greenlandic Eskimo word *eqqumiitsuliorneq* come to signify something like the European notion of art. The predicament remains, however, as European art is what Kaalund’s book is *not* about. (Arke 2010:15)

Like the institutions that have been talked about in this chapter, Kaalund too generalizes the Greenlanders of the past and basically sees them all as artists for decorating their tools and weapons. She did not mention the fact that Greenlanders did so because they thought that this

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<sup>31</sup> My translation: “Promptly one then would ask: But what is art? Is it art to decorate ones costume and tools? To carve small figures to amulets as protection, is that conscious art? To admit, the boundaries between art and handicraft are fluid and likewise so between individual works of art and those magic figures that have a commanding look. Anyway, I would say yes, this is art. The breath-taking about Eskimo art is just that it has its origin in a difficult and austere life, often on the edge of the border of existence – that it was necessary to develop ones tools with great confidence and artistic abilities, and also necessary to develop figurative expressions for spiritual terms. Furthermore the fact that the small figures radiate a will to live and vitality, is proof for me that art emerges from need.”

would bring them greater hunting success and protect them from sicknesses. Instead, Kaalund, like the explorers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, romanticises Greenlanders by saying that their art has its “origin in a difficult and austere life, often on the edge of the border of existence” (Kaalund 1990:16). She even goes on to say that the living conditions in Greenland were so harsh that it is surprising that Greenlanders still had the material and spiritual resources left to pursue art (Kaalund 1990:16) – a very naïve point of view that pretty much sums up the spirit of the exhibitions at the National Museums of Denmark and Greenland, as well as Nuuk Art Museum though. The aesthetics of primitivism is the reoccurring theme that could be found in these institutions. Even at Greenland National Museum & Archives, which tried so hard to distance itself from Denmark and to point out the consequences of colonialism on Greenland, these motifs could be found. The photo opportunity billboard mentioned in chapter 3.2.2 is one example – another is the juxtaposition of a Greenlandic and a Danish home that actually were two Greenlandic homes (ibid.). The museum went so far as to present an untrue representation just to make a point – that Denmark was the colonial power of Greenland and that Danes lived a much better life during colonisation than Greenlanders. While this statement is not exactly wrong, its depiction in the museum is. One can wonder whether this was a way of subtle rebellion since almost all the artefacts presented at Greenland National Museum were repatriated from Denmark and therefore still had their colonial stamps on them. In any way, for a country that has gained self-government not too long ago and that strives for independence, its National Museum resembles more a duplicate of its Danish colleague while trying hard to fight anything Danish. And while the Greenlandic government representative Stephen Heilmann pointed out in 1991 that “indtil nu har vi savnet en fremstilling af vores historie, sådan som vi selv ser den”<sup>32</sup> (Heilmann 1991:7), the question is whether or not the National Museum of Greenland really presents a history they actually believe in.

The same goes for Nuuk Art Museum or the Greenlandic Art Museum as Svend Junge would have wanted it. Here it was Junge’s personal preferences that decided about what Greenlandic art is and what not. Ironically enough, his definition of Greenlandic art mainly describes paintings by Danish explorers, preferably of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, depicting Greenlanders as noble savages or figures made of bones which have only been produced in this way since colonisation.

Time will tell whether depictions of the Greenlander as the noble savage remain but to put it with the words of Ole Høiris:

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<sup>32</sup> My translation: “Up until now, we have lacked a representation of our history, the way we ourselves see it”

Med globaliseringen og medier, der holder ungdommen international og aktuelt orienteret, således som det har været siden engang i 1990'erne, mister identiteten som kajakmand og fanger nok sin autenticitet blandt ungdommen i Grønland, ligesom tilsvarende før-moderne identiteter er blevet tømt for autentisk indhold for ungdommen andre steder, og hermed skulle den eskimo, der har været så meget igennem og været brugt til så meget i den europæiske idéhistorie også i den internt formulerede ideologi endelig blive en til Grønland hørende borger i en globaliseret civilisation. (Høiris 2011:143-144)<sup>33</sup>

The Greenlandic as a citizen of a globalised world – that could be a topic of a new exhibition in the National Museums of Denmark and Greenland and there sure can be found art corresponding to this theme for Nuuk Art Museum too. In order to become cultural institutions that correspond with the present and not just the past, this is a task that needs to be put on the agenda of all three of them.

## 2.5 Summary

This chapter was concerned with the representation of Greenlandic culture in museums. I visited three museums in Denmark and Greenland over the course of the summer of 2015: the National Museum of Denmark, Greenland National Museum & Archives and Nuuk Art Museum. The overall theme I found in these museums was traditional Greenlandic culture. None of these museums focussed on contemporary Greenlandic culture and Nuuk Art Museum was the only one that at least included a small exhibition on contemporary issues in Greenland. The National Museum of Denmark and Greenland National Museum & Archives both had a strong focus on portraying Greenlandic hunting culture, even though the latter also told about colonial times and the changes it brought to the country. Reasons for the representation of Greenland in this way can be found in the structure and organization of both museums. The artefacts presented at the National Museum of Denmark were mainly collected during the time of Knud Rasmussen's 5<sup>th</sup> Thule expedition and are therefore colonial in nature. The artefacts of Greenland National Museum & Archives have mainly been repatriated from the National Museum of Denmark so that they too, originate from this time and still reflect Danish views on Greenland of colonial times.

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<sup>33</sup> My translation: With globalisation and media, that keep the youth international and informed about news, as it has been since one time in the 1990s, the identity of the kayak man and hunter loses its authenticity among the youth in Greenland, likewise corresponding to pre-modern identities being cleared of authentic content for youth in other places and therefore should the Eskimo, who has been through so much and has been used so much in the European history of ideas and in the internal formulated ideology, finally become a Greenlandic citizen in a globalised world.

Nuuk Art Museum was set up of a private collection of the Danish entrepreneur Svend Junge. Even though it is not a museum in the strict sense, it claims to be one and advertises to present Greenlandic art from the past and today. Contemporary art however only makes up a small amount of the museum's collection so that a romanticised image of Greenland in colonial times also prevails here. This can be ascribed to Junge only collecting art that fit his personal taste and due to restrictions he left the museum for after his death, this image will continue to prevail, even though the museum's new management makes an effort in inviting local artists to exhibit in their rooms.

Time will tell whether the three institutions named above will abandon the theme of primitivism in their exhibitions and focus on a more contemporary depiction of Greenlandic culture as it is today, though chances are that colonialism and primitivism will prevail at these places for some more time before anything will change.

### **3. The threatened Indigenous: Greenlandic Culture in the Light of Climate Change**

Greenland often is associated with climate change – of course, since the melting of the ice cap could result in ocean levels around the world raising a couple of meters while even one meter could already endanger places like New York City and London (Scherer 2013:18). Early results of global warming can already be noticed, in the Arctic in particular, and of course this has an effect on indigenous peoples and their traditional ways of subsistence. The Sami of Scandinavia are confronted with changed weather conditions which lead to more rain and ice in winter so that reindeers have trouble accessing food. Also Greenland notices the effects of global warming and it already is possible to grow potatoes in the south of the country (Scherer 2013:40). Furthermore mining in Greenland is getting more and more possible and therefore poses a threat to the country's flora and fauna. Last but not least, the melting of the sea ice near Greenland opens the way for new and faster transportation routes from America to Asia through the Arctic. Greenland therefore clearly is in the focus of the discussion about climate change and that also has an effect on the discussion about Greenlanders and their living situations.

Indigenous peoples in the Arctic are often represented in relation to climate change and especially so the Inuit of Greenland, Canada and Alaska as they live the closest to the happenings of global warming. If the earth gets warmer, the ice of the Arctic melts which thus changes the living environment of these people. Therefore Greenlanders and Inuit in other Arctic regions alike, are often represented as victims in this context – indigenous peoples whose culture and traditions are threatened due to climate change. That the Inuit however might not even be as vulnerable as the coverage about them makes people believe and furthermore the fact that Inuit have had coping strategies to get through colonialism which might also help them to deal with future challenges without losing their culture, often tends to be forgotten (cf. Sejersen 2015:xi). Newspapers around the world run stories about the endangered Inuit whose living environment slowly but surely is destroyed by climate change. A simple search for “Inuit” and “global warming” on the internet provides us with newspaper headlines ranging from “Why the Inuit people are walking on thin ice” (*The Telegraph* in 2005) to “Global warming is killing us too, say Inuit” (*The Guardian* in 2003) and further “Inuit Life threatened by Climate Change” (*CBS News* in 2007). These articles all draw on the Inuit people as an example to how big an effect climate change has in the world. By telling their story, it becomes easier for people to understand what global warming really means. The media is not afraid to

dramatize the situation though. These newspaper headlines lead to dramatic stories from the ice melting earlier and quicker and thus polar bears becoming extinct in the future and further to how many Inuit died while hunting out on the ice – incidents that already happened before anyone ever thought about climate change.

Indigenous people are in this case used in media coverage on climate change to put a human face to the environmental phenomenon even though the Arctic is not inhabited by indigenous peoples alone. In fact, only 10% of the people living in the Arctic belong to indigenous cultures, researcher Frank Sejersen claims (Sejersen 2015:2). So why focus on the effects of climate change on indigenous peoples? Sure enough, traditional modes of subsistence are threatened by global warming but do all indigenous people really still live on hunting? Have times not changed during modernization and colonialism?

If we look at Greenland, claims that Greenlanders do not live the traditional Inuit lifestyle anymore have been made since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Høiris 2011:130). Also, the country's capital city Nuuk already has more in common with any city in Denmark than it has with Inuit traditions. Why the ongoing victimization of Inuit in the context of climate change then? And are there other ways to depict them in this context? In fact, a common way to talk about Greenlanders when talking about climate change is also to refer to new possibilities and career options opening up (Sejersen 2015:xi). The fact that it steadily becomes possible to grow potatoes in Southern Greenland then quickly leads to a discussion on whether or not Greenlanders will give up hunting to go farming (Sejersen 2015:xi).

The future of the Arctic and the future of indigenous cultures is highly discussed in the current context about climate change. Now that most people actually believe that climate change exists and do not think of it as nonsense anymore, as was the case maybe 10 or 15 years ago, indigenous peoples in the Arctic and first of all Greenlanders have become the centre of attention in research and media alike. This chapter thus will analyse two art exhibitions that were set up in the summer of 2015 which also portray Greenlandic culture in the light of climate change. One of them is “Greenland Spirit” – an exhibition by the artist MARTI which I visited at the Greenlandic House in Copenhagen. The other one is “Red Snow” which is a collaboration between different Arctic artists and researchers and which I visited at the North Atlantic House in Copenhagen. When analysing the two, I aim to find answers to questions like: “How do the artists depict the future of Greenland?”, “What are the results of climate change as shown in the exhibition?” and finally, “In what way are Greenlanders being portrayed?”. I will get back to the ambivalent discussion on the Greenlander as the threatened indigenous or the creative future-maker as presented by Frank Sejersen and will analyse the two exhibitions “Greenland

Spirit” and “Red Snow” in regard to the background of the artists involved as well as the discussion on climate change in general.

### **3.1 “Greenland Spirit”: The Greenlandic House, Copenhagen**

I visited the exhibition “Greenland Spirit” at the Greenlandic House in Copenhagen after it had already been exhibited at Nuuk Art Museum and Katuaq, the cultural centre of Nuuk, in April 2015. The Greenlandic House (Det Grønlandske Hus) is a meeting place for Greenlanders living in Denmark and Danes who have lived in or are planning on moving to Greenland. The institution has houses in Copenhagen, Aarhus, Aalborg and Odense. It offers guidance on moving to Greenland but also helps Greenlandic expats in Denmark with practical issues such as filling out tax forms or translating letters. The Greenlandic Houses also offer legal aid and support, for example for Greenlandic prisoners in Denmark. First and foremost however, the houses are a cultural meeting place where people can meet, drink coffee and read the newspaper. The Greenlandic House in Copenhagen for example also has a book store with all kinds of books on Greenland as well as a library and computers for guests to work on. The cafeteria there even serves typical Greenlandic food once a week and the house is open for events like concerts and readings and also for changing art exhibitions.

“Greenland Spirit” was one of those changing exhibitions – on display from June 8<sup>th</sup> until July 31<sup>st</sup>. The artist behind this exhibition is MARTI, also known as Marti Mueller or Blue Sky Woman, a name she got from the Ojibwe in Canada after her initiation into the tribe (Finnich 2015). MARTI is a photographer, journalist and former professor of linguistics at Sorbonne University who grew up in the US and has lived in France and India for the last decades. She has been involved in various environmental projects, such as Auroville, an experimental town in India which is based on the principle of human unity<sup>34</sup> and has also worked with UNESCO (Finnich 2015). Her photographic work includes portraying the Burning Man Festival in the desert of Nevada – pictures she exhibited in among other places, Paris, Singapore and Tokyo. Part of her work is also permanently exhibited at the Musée de Louvre in Paris.<sup>35</sup>

“Greenland Spirit” is a project MARTI has worked on since the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP 15 in 2009, hence her exhibition has a direct relation to climate

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<sup>34</sup> Auroville – The City of Dawn: “Background” (2015, November 5) [online]. –URL: <http://www.auroville.org/contents/542>

<sup>35</sup> BURNING MAN as seen by MARTI: “MARTI” (2015, November 5) [online]. –URL: <http://www.martiphotoburningm.com/#!about/c240r>



change and shows the identity of Greenlanders in a time between traditions and modernity (MARTI 2015). MARTI chose the subheading “Safeguarding Inuit Culture in the Face of Climate Change” on the project’s website in February 2015 and the description “For each and every one of us, it is not easy to know who we are in such a rapidly changing world” on an exhibition poster I got from her in July 2015. The project aims to preserve Inuit culture and MARTI hopes to be able to exhibit in other Arctic regions after having done so in Greenland and Denmark in 2015 (MARTI 2015).

### **3.1.1 Connecting Traditions with Modernity**

“Greenland Spirit” at the Greenlandic House consisted of two exhibitions and one movie. The main exhibition with photographs framed on metal plates and information panels on climate change could be found on the second floor while another exhibition with more unofficial photographs could be found in the cafeteria on the first floor of the Greenlandic House, along with a movie. The main exhibition portrayed climate change in general and its impact on Greenland along with Greenlandic artists and their stories. Upon entering the room, you were first presented facts about the artist behind the exhibition, MARTI, and then facts about climate change and Greenland before going on to learn more about Greenlandic culture and hear stories of Greenlandic artists. The exhibition ended with giving information on the possible impact of climate change on Greenland. The artists that were involved and being portrayed in this exhibition included among others, Nukaq Martin-Lyberth, Nukâka Coster-Waldau and Gaz Zaa Lung Qaavigaq. Many more artists have been photographed for this exhibition but these three have also been given the opportunity to tell their stories which MARTI has included to show the changes that Greenlandic culture has undergone in the last couple of decades.



*Figure 10 – A poster featuring some of MARTI’s pictures for “Greenland Spirit” in the backyard of the Greenlandic House*

Nukaq, a Greenlandic drum and mask dancer, for example told about how his foster father told him to jump up and down and hit himself with his arms to stay warm when being out on a hunting trip and how he secretly listened to traditional Greenlandic music whenever his foster parents were away as they did not like the sound of drums. Gaz Zaa Lung, a Greenlandic drum singer, then told the story of her father who, being out hunting on the ice, suddenly saw himself on a piece of ice that was about to float away but who fortunately was able to jump onto solid ice in time. And finally Nukâka, a Greenlandic actress, told the visitor about her first visit to Denmark and how she felt that all the trees were pushing her down. She also said that people in Denmark would ask her questions about Greenland, like for example “Is everyone in Greenland an alcoholic?”, and that people in Greenland would tell her that she had become very Danish. All these stories were printed out and hung on the wall in the Greenlandic original and in an English translation underneath and they all told of different Greenlanders and their identity, or rather how they became who they are today. These stories were accompanied by facts about the effects of climate change, for example rising sea levels, more and stronger storms and of course the melting of Greenlandic glaciers that have existed for thousands of years and that represent about 30% of the fresh water resources on the earth.

However the main objects of the exhibition were the many photographs that MARTI took of different Greenlandic artists. These pictures showed Greenlanders contradicting the

past with the future, for example dressed in traditional clothing in front of modern street art or when showing their body modifications. These portraits had in common the expression of or search of a Greenlandic identity in a modern world and were staged by the artists themselves which differentiated them with the ones exhibited in the cafeteria of the Greenlandic House. To accompany the themes of climate change and identity as shown in the main exhibition of “Greenland Spirit”, music was being played. The title “Arctic Symphony” by Ivan Avakian was composed solely for this exhibition and the visitor was able to hear what sounded like a storm, before hearing someone breathing heavily while walking through snow and finally water dripping, creating the illusion that something was melting. Finally, the exhibition room on the second floor also exhibited a sled covered with the fur of a musk oxen.

The exhibition in the cafeteria of the building consisted of in-situ photographs as MARTI called them. These photographs were taken in a more informal manner but nonetheless were very rich in expression. They showed for example a Greenlander dressed in fur at a coin laundry; a woman with traditional Greenlandic face paint holding a mobile phone, and a Greenlandic woman first wearing a blonde wig and the Danish flag as a dress and then later wearing the Greenlandic flag and short black hair.



*Figure 11 – The Greenlandic artist Nukâka Coster-Waldau wearing a blonde wig and the Danish flag on the left and no wig plus the Greenlandic flag on the right, photographed by MARTI*

These photographs were not printed on metal plates like the ones in the main exhibition but were only printed on white paper and framed in glass, which made them look less official. There also was no information about the exhibition or climate change available in the cafeteria which might have made the visitor unsure at first about whether this was actually part of “Greenland Spirit” or not.

In addition to these photographs however, there was a movie played in the cafeteria which was produced by Greenland Spirit Productions in 2015 and which also focusses on climate change and modern day Greenland. The movie was played in English and lasted for about 30 minutes but there also was a shorter Greenlandic version played afterwards. Greenlandic artists like Miki Jensen (singer in the Greenlandic band “Small Time Giants”), Nukâka Coster-Waldau and Angu Motzfeldt (Greenlandic Singer-Songwriter) have been interviewed for this movie and answered to questions like “What is Greenland for you?” and “How do you feel being Greenlandic?” Nukâka as well as Angu for example said that Greenland is home to them while Miki said that he always wanted to get away from Greenland when he was a teenager but started to become homesick after two years of living in Denmark. When being asked about the biggest changes in their lifetime, answers ranging from “becoming a Dad” to “getting internet access” were given and when being asked about their concerns for Greenland, topics from “mining” to “not being independent” were named. The issue of climate change was also addressed in the movie and it was pointed out that climate change also has a positive effect as it draws attention to the country. It was said that 15 years ago, you had to show people where Greenland or Nuuk were on a map but today people know more about the country.

### **3.1.2 “*Gradually a theme unfolds*”**

To find out whether it was the artist’s intention to also draw attention to the country or to educate people on Greenland, I talked with MARTI about her exhibition in June 2015 and also talked to visitors about their impressions and views on “Greenland Spirit” later on.

MARTI told me that her intention with “Greenland Spirit” was to show the modern face of Greenland and contribute to the new pride movement that is currently undergoing in the country. According to MARTI, Greenlanders lack self-esteem which is a problem that goes back to colonialism but nowadays, more and more Greenlanders are becoming proud of their heritage again and want the country to be independent. “Greenland Spirit” was designed to contribute to that movement and make Greenlanders proud of where they come from. Therefore the audience she had in mind for this exhibition was first and foremost Greenlanders but of course also Danes and visitors from other countries.

MARTI also wanted to strengthen Inuit identity as a sense of community with this project and help to ease the transition into a modern world, she said. “Greenland Spirit” was a platform for Greenlanders to express their identity in a changing culture and MARTI let the

contributing artists speak for themselves by letting them choose the setting and/or props for the different pictures. The picture of Nukâka Coster-Waldau first wearing a blonde wig and the Danish flag around her body and then appearing in short black hair and with the Greenlandic flag is therefore very ironic, MARTI said, since Greenland is not actually independent.

To the question why she used photography as the main medium in her project, MARTI referred to her background as a writer and journalist and furthermore said that photography is a strong statement in the sense that it would touch your heart before it would reach your mind. Through photography you can express things that are very difficult to put into words and photography furthermore frames reality, MARTI said. She also explains why she contrasted elements of old Greenlandic traditions with modern day elements in her pictures – this way would play with what you are expecting and furthermore break your preconceptions, she said. When asking the question what the main challenge in creating this project was, MARTI answered that it was the cold – which in itself also is a very popular preconception people have when thinking of Greenland.

To find out how visitors of “Greenland Spirit” actually perceive the country, I asked four people about their opinions and impressions of the exhibition and Greenlandic culture in general. A visitor from Norway for example described “Greenland Spirit” as different to other exhibitions and regarded Greenlanders as peaceful people. He also criticised that their culture is fading away and that people have to live in the western way and compared this to “what we learned from the Native Americans” as the visitor said. It is interesting to see a visitor from Norway speaking about the modernization of indigenous cultures and using the example of Native Americans when he could have also used the example of the Sami people in his own country though. This visitor’s partner agreed and also pointed out the physical strength of Greenlanders as shown when for example rowing a kayak. A visitor from Denmark claimed that “Greenland Spirit” expresses what is good about Greenland while “in Denmark you often hear the bad stories only”. This visitor also said that she perceived all Greenlanders as artists and furthermore as very strong and proud people. A second visitor also from Denmark, said that “Greenland Spirit” confirmed his ideas about the country and that he perceived the pictures as very Greenlandic in the sense that they all contain a, what he called, “low-voiced irony”. His perception of Greenland is that the country has a lot of gifted artists and musicians who all are connected by the constant effort to combine old traditions and modern times while preserving and adopting both.

It seems like visitors focused more on the topic of identity and what it means to be a Greenlander in a time between traditions and modernity, rather than climate change. Also my

talk with MARTI was more focussed on these themes than it actually was on climate change. The exhibition itself however casted light on different themes of contemporary Greenlandic society. On the one hand, you had information on climate change and how this has an effect on Greenland while on the other hand you could find the topic of Greenlandic culture in a modern world and even information on the relationship of Greenlanders and Danes.

Climate change for example is described by Marti as: “Everywhere on our planet, the climate is changing. The oceans are beginning to rise. Droughts and floods, high winds, and natural disasters, are more frequent. Greenland is on the front line”. On the following information panel, Gaz Zaa Lung then talked about her childhood in Greenland which can be seen as a contrast to life in modern Greenland today: “I remember my family always had enough food when we were on hunting trips in the spring, but sometimes there was no sugar or tea, because we were far from the store. But we always had meat. That was all I ate as a child.” Finally, Nukâka thematised the relationship between Denmark and Greenland when telling her story:

I remember going to Denmark. There were so many people and trees. There were lots of insects, too. I remember feeling the trees pushing me down. I missed the vast wide horizons of Greenland. I remember that winters in Copenhagen were gray, wet, and cold. There wasn't always snow. People did not laugh. They seemed sad. In the summer the nights were as dark as our winters. I remember noticing how stressed people became when they missed their trains. Now I was on clock life and every minute counted. I remember when people in Denmark smiled and said, “Don't worry, you don't look like a Greenlander. You must be a mix.” I remember they would sometimes say, “Tell me, is everyone in Greenland an alcoholic?” I remember going back to Greenland and people scoffing, “You're so Danish.” When I returned to Greenland I breathed dry clean air once again. I could see faraway. The villages were like anthills. People were friendly. I remember when my brother got his first bird. Thirteen people shared it. (Nukâka Coster-Waldau in “Greenland Spirit” 2015)

“Greenland Spirit” thus combined a lot of different themes and topics and it could be difficult to find the relation between all the different pictures and themes, particularly when looking at the more unofficial pictures that were exhibited in the cafeteria of the Greenlandic House. The journalist Mette Sandbye wrote about “Greenland Spirit” in the Danish newspaper “Weekendavisen” therefore:

Det grønlandske Hus viser den i Paris boende fotograf med kunstnernavnet Marti, som ser på det grønlandske hverdags- og kulturliv – i klimaforandringernes tegn. Det er sympatisk og vigtigt, men det er også en form- og indholdsmæssigt rodet utstilling, fordelt over tre rum og flere etager med et væld af forskelligartede fotografier, nogle af dem overbearbejdede, af

kendte såvel som ukendte grønlandere, tilsat lige dele informative og højstemte citater på væggene. Udstillingen vilt alt for meget på for lidt plads, hvilket er synd, for den rummer især fine, energiladede portrætter af nutidens grønlandere. (Sandbye 2015)<sup>36</sup>

The fact that the exhibition could easily be perceived as unstructured could also be ascribed to MARTI constantly changing and developing it. As mentioned earlier, “Greenland Spirit” was exhibited at Katuaq and Nuuk Art Museum before coming to the Greenlandic House and it seems like it had undergone a few changes since its very first opening. The Danish art historian Katrine Finnich has visited “Greenland Spirit” at both, Katuaq and Nuuk Art Museum in spring 2015 and also talked to MARTI about her project. She writes:

*“Gradually a theme unfolds,”* Marti explains, when I ask her how this project became what it is today: An impressive collection of photos, drawings with interpretations of her photos by the French artist, Taja, recorded memories of Greenlanders, music, concerts, a soundscape and performances and workshops. About 75 Greenlanders have participated in the project and many people have been touched by it. At the moment there is the exhibition at Katuaq, and another at the Art Museum here in Nuuk. I have seen them both, and just when I think I have seen everything, new photos appear, projected on the wall in Katuaq. I take a look at Marti’s computer screen, and again new images appear, some destined for the upcoming exhibition in Copenhagen. (Finnich 2015)

It seems like “Greenland Spirit” has always been a work in progress so that might be the reason why its focus might not always have been clear. However, the fact that MARTI has worked on the project for several years and that about 75 people contributed to it, tells us that there must be more material available than could ever be exhibited which leads us back to Mette Sandbye’s statement that MARTI wanted to achieve way too much on too little space (Sandbye 2015). It could indeed look like “Greenland Spirit” aimed to achieve too much for an art exhibition – of this or any size. MARTI herself sees Greenland as an international industrial nation in the future, where the old Greenlandic culture does not have space anymore. She equates modernization with climate change even though modernization already started during colonisation. On an information panel in the exhibition she claims:

CLIMATE CHANGE will have an enormous impact on the entire future of the nation of Greenland. As its glaciers melt, Greenland will rapidly become a crossroads for commerce

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<sup>36</sup> My translation: “The Greenlandic House showcases the photographer under the alias Marti who lives in Paris, who looks at the Greenlandic everyday- and cultural life – in the context of climate change. This is pleasant and important but it also is a, in form and content, unstructured exhibition, spread out over three rooms and many floors with a lot of different photographs, some of them over-edited, of famous as well as unknown Greenlanders, with both, informative and enthusiastic quotations on the walls in addition. The exhibition wants way too much in too little space, which is a shame, because it hosts particularly nice, energetic portraits of contemporary Greenlanders.”

among the large industrialized nations. Young Greenlanders will have to find their way in a new world without necessarily having acquired a solid value system. Traditional languages could easily be replaced by the language of commerce and business. The long-term goal of protecting Mother Earth might disappear. It is important to safeguard our homes, culture and history and honor nature and our human nature with all our hearts. GREENLAND SPIRIT is a small step. (MARTI in “Greenland Spirit” in 2015)

It remains open for discussion whether Greenland really faces a future of being a country where English is the main language of business and old Greenlandic traditions disappear. Also, whether an art exhibition can really contribute to impeding changes occurring in society is questionable. It might actually be a small step, like MARTI said, but it remains a big aim.

### **3.2 “Red Snow”: The North Atlantic House, Copenhagen**

The art exhibition “Red Snow” is an interdisciplinary and international project of artists and scientists from Northern Europe with the aim to tell about climate change and its influence on people living in the North. The project seeks to illustrate changes in the Northern environment that can be traced back to global warming and furthermore tells how Northerners living at the North Atlantic (Norway, Greenland, Iceland and the Faroese Islands) deal with and adapt to these changes. The project was funded and supported by the Government of Greenland, the Royal Arctic Line, Katuaq, The North Atlantic House in Copenhagen and the two Nordic Houses in Iceland and the Faroese Islands.

Between June and August 2015, “Red Snow” was on display at the North Atlantic House (Nordatlantens Brygge) in Copenhagen. According to their website, the North Atlantic House is a cultural centre where art and culture from the Faroese Islands, Greenland, Iceland and the remaining North can be experienced.<sup>37</sup> The former warehouse does not only offer space for art exhibitions and events but is also where for example the Arctic Council, the Embassies of Greenland, Iceland and the Faroese Islands, as well as the tourist bureau Visit Greenland can be found.

At the time of my visit, “Red Snow” was situated on the first floor next to the café, souvenir shop and reception area, while there was another exhibition featuring the work of Emanuel A. Petersen on the second floor. “Red Snow” had at that point already been exhibited

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<sup>37</sup> Nordatlantens Brygge: «Information om Nordatlantens Brygge» (19 November 2015) [online]. –URL: <http://www.nordatlantens.dk/da/om-os/information/>



at Katuaq in Nuuk and it was planned to show the exhibition in the Nordic Houses of Iceland and the Faroese Islands afterwards.

The exhibition itself consists of different artworks and information panels by different artists and scientists. As I said, the aim of “Red Snow” is to show climate change and its effect on the North. This is expressed through photographs, texts, videos, music, paintings and sculptures. These expressions are as different from each other as the artists and scientists themselves. You could for example find a video about a drum dancing workshop in Nuuk right next to an information poster about the climate changes of the last ice age in the exhibition rooms in Copenhagen. Combining science with art was supposed to create an even stronger impression of climate change and reach those, who are still unaware of what these changes mean for the North and the rest of the world (Nordatlantens Brygge 2015:5).

### **3.2.1 Science meets Art**

As already mentioned, “Red Snow” is a circulating exhibition which was shown in Nuuk, Copenhagen, Reykjavik and Tórshavn. Therefore the set-up changed from one exhibition venue to the other. In the following I will describe the way it was set up at the North Atlantic House in Copenhagen.

Red Snow was exhibited in one single room at the North Atlantic House where the different works of art were placed in the middle of the room and on the walls. There was no clear pattern as to how the art was organised (for example, scientific facts first and art later). Instead, information posters and artworks were placed right next and in contrast to each other. In the hallway right outside the exhibition hall for example, you could find a TV screen showing a movie about a drum dance workshop at Katuaq with the Greenlandic drum dancer Pauline Motzfeldt. Opposite of the screen, there was an information poster of the two scientists Tine Lander Rasmussen and Erik Thomsen from Tromsø and Aarhus University, which presented information about climate changes during the Ice Age. Only after these two presentations could an information poster about the exhibition be found.

Upon entering the exhibition hall then, you could first find a book and video of the Icelandic Botanist Thora Ellen Thorhallsdottir on the right side, which was named “Creation of Nature” and which presented Algae that paint glaciers in a red colour. This was followed by a photo essay on “Life in Ny-Ålesund” by Monica Kristensen on a tablet, showing pictures of

Spitsbergen. Next to this was a slide show of the Icelandic glaciologist Helgi Björnsson, presenting the earth's ice sheets and climate change.

These were all the information and art works situated on the right side of the exhibition hall. At the very end of the room, you could find the art work that gave “Red Snow” its byname: “Ice in Motion” by the artist Bente Elisabeth Endresen. Endresen grew up in Northern Norway before moving to Greenland and later settling down in Denmark. “Ice in Motion” is a collection of 7 oil paintings depicting various forms of ice – melting ice, snow and snowflakes or algae turning the ice red. They had been prominently placed at the very end of the exhibition hall and took up the space of the whole wall too.

In front of these paintings, in the middle of the room, was another artwork called “Walking on water”. The Icelandic artist Magnus Palsson created sculptures that were supposed to make the visitor feel as if they were walking on water while the sculptures at the same time were sinking. You could for example see naked humans but also a pair of hands holding on to an ironing board. Palsson wanted to demonstrate with this work that the line between safety and danger is very thin nowadays.<sup>38</sup> Next to Palsson's work, you could find a video installation from the Icelandic artist Ragnhildur Stefansdottir, called “Over-Under”. The video depicted a woman going under water and coming up for air over and over again while the visitor only saw her head. Stefansdottir furthermore exhibited a sculpture of a woman completely covered in fur which he named “The skin I live in”. The artist wanted to express with these two works that it is necessary to explore our cultural roots and traditions if we want to understand climate change.<sup>39</sup>

Further on, in the middle of the exhibition hall was an artwork of another Icelandic sculptor, Kristin Reynisdottir, who exhibited the margins where the largest Icelandic glaciers meet the ground by using acrylic glass, stones, paint, strings and metal. Her sculptures were on the floor as well as hanging from the wall. At the very end of the facing wall then were several artworks of the Greenlandic artist Julia Pars, as well as a video on climate change and glaciology of Helgi Björnsson. The works of Julia Pars included “Dream Materialization”, “Dream catchers”, “Drawings”, “Natures influence” and “Wisdom”.<sup>40</sup> While “Wisdom” was a sculpture made of driftwood and stone that draws on the fact that the Inuit have gained their

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<sup>38</sup> RED SNOW: “Participants in RED SNOW – ICE IN MOTION” (2015, December 17) [online]. –URL: [http://redsnow.dk/?page\\_id=22](http://redsnow.dk/?page_id=22)

<sup>39</sup> RED SNOW: “Participants in RED SNOW – ICE IN MOTION” (2015, December 17) [online]. –URL: [http://redsnow.dk/?page\\_id=22](http://redsnow.dk/?page_id=22)

<sup>40</sup> As named on: RED SNOW: “Participants in RED SNOW – ICE IN MOTION” (2015, December 17) [online]. –URL: [http://redsnow.dk/?page\\_id=22](http://redsnow.dk/?page_id=22) The information panel in the exhibition hall actually titled the pieces “Dreams from the Past I-IV” but I am going to use the titles as presented on the website for easier reference.

knowledge and wisdom from nature, “Natures influence” was a set of paintings depicting a Greenlandic woman in different face paints to show that the Inuit have adapted well to climate changes in the last thousands of years.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, there are still worries about the future in Greenlandic society which Pars expressed through “Dream Materialization” and “Dream Catchers”.

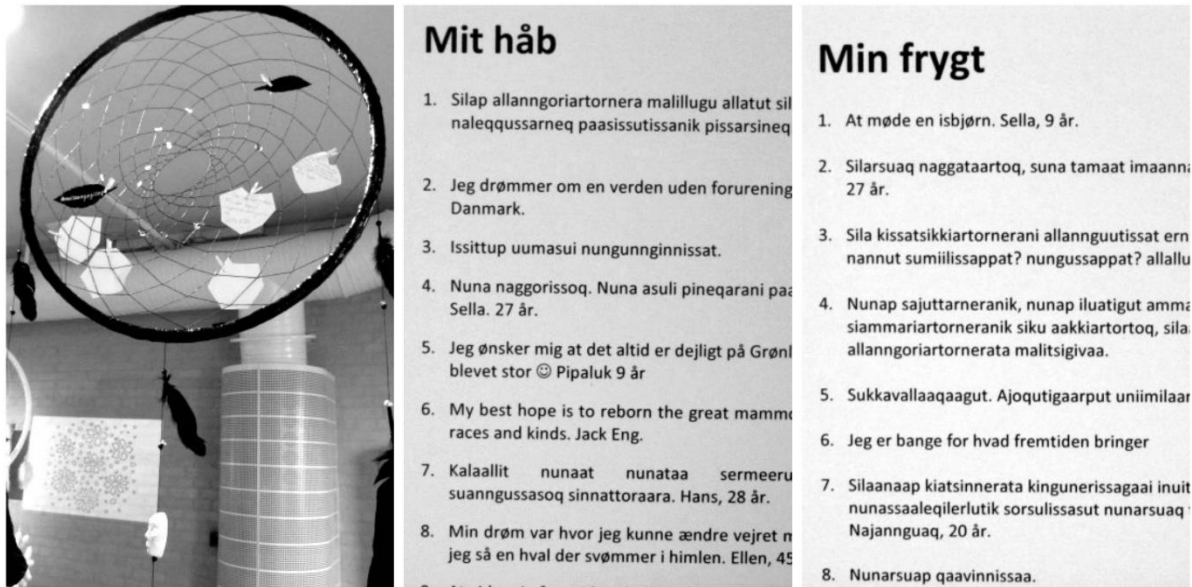


Figure 12 – “Dream Catchers” by Julia Pars

Pars used a white and a black dream catcher in the exhibition alongside the request to the visitor to write down their hopes and fears for the future in the context of climate change. She gathered a lot of opinions this way when “Red Snow” was exhibited in Nuuk and portrayed some of these in the exhibition in Copenhagen, which I will present in more detail in the next section.

“Dream Materialization” is a glass case depicting polar bears on green grass, some of them lying down and some of them walking around. Pars wrote the background story of this artwork in Greenlandic and English on the glass, since she got the idea for this piece in a dream where she was walking with polar bears on grass. I will also come back to this piece later on again.

“Drawings” then is a slide show of different drawings of Inuit symbols and mythical creatures. The exhibition finally is set to music of the Faroese musician Kristian Blak.

<sup>41</sup> RED SNOW: “Participants in RED SNOW – ICE IN MOTION” (2015, December 17) [online]. –URL: [http://redsnow.dk/?page\\_id=22](http://redsnow.dk/?page_id=22)



Figure 13 – “Dream Materialization” by Julia Pars

Most of the information given was in Danish and English while the main information poster presenting the exhibition in the entrance hall however, was solely in Danish. Some text was also in Greenlandic as for example Julia Pars’ “Dream Catchers” and “Dream Materialization”, which however was combined with Danish and English.

### 3.2.2 Hopes and Fears for the Future

“Red Snow” is a project of different artists and scientists who each focus on different aspects of climate change. While some focused on glaciers, others focused on climate change as a whole and its effects on humans and nature in general. Therefore not all the artworks presented in the earlier section are actually relevant for this topic and I chose to only analyse those pieces that actually can be considered to have a direct connection to Greenland. These would be all of Julia Pars’ works of art, as well as the drum dancing work shop of Pauline Motzfeldt. Also Ragnhildur Stefansdottir’s “The skin I live in” and “Over-Under”, as well as Magnus Palsson’s “Walking on water” will be considered in the in-depth analysis as they depict the effects of climate change on cultures in general. I will however also provide an analysis of “Red Snow” as a whole in the following.

“Red Snow” is described and advertised as “promoting dialogue about climate change and what it means for the lives of people living in the North Atlantic” (Proppè 2015:8). The exhibition furthermore, as the Danish newspaper Ebeltoft Folketidende describes, has its starting point in an impartial dialog of Nordic artists and scientists which nurtures a strong concern for the changes that are currently happening (Ebeltoft Folketidende 2015). The attitude of the exhibition is clearly negative and all facts and opinions in regard to climate change are expressed in a rather dramatic and worrying way, no matter whether one looked at information posters or artwork. The protector of the North Atlantic House in Copenhagen and former president of Iceland, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, even says in the preface to the exhibition catalogue:

As the ice melts at an unprecedented rate, the habitat of men and beasts is submerged. So sinks the home of the mind where a fragment of eternity has resided for as long as we can remember in settlements on the vast arctic ice. A fragment of the eternity of the glacier in Iceland and in the northernmost parts of the Nordic countries has become a symbol of precariousness. It is more urgent than words can express that we stop this man-made natural catastrophe that threatens the Earth through drastic climate changes and threatens most of all that life which cannot thrive without having firm ice underfoot. With Greenlandic drumming we now try to rouse those who are still not awake to this, the greatest threat to mankind. Mixed in with the Greenlandic drumming we hear the voices of Nordic scientists who know better than anyone else the terrible effects of the glacial melting. The choir now singing of the Red Snow also includes musicians and artists, showing what cannot be expressed in words. I especially welcome the cooperation of artists and scientists, lending their voices together to this choral suite about melting ice. I fully believe that this concerted effort of science and art will amplify the sound so that it may reach those who have been sleeping. (Finnbogadóttir 2015:5)

I therefore would not say that “Red Snow” provides an impartial dialogue on climate change. It rather combines scientific facts with art to make an even clearer standpoint, namely that climate change is going to destroy the earth and has to be stopped. “Red Snow” draws on climate change narratives as already described in the introduction to this chapter. The project clearly sees the Arctic as a vulnerable region and its inhabitants as victims of man-made actions. This becomes even more obvious if we have a look at what the different works of art are supposed to express.

Magnus Pálsson’s “Walking on water” for example presents the apocalypse caused by climate change. His sculptures of naked bodies appear only halfway and give the impression that they are sinking into the ground – or water in this case. There even is a pair of hands

holding onto an ironing board, implying that the apocalypse came suddenly. According to the website of “Red Snow”, this piece “is a profound demonstration of how fragile our environment is and how thin the line is between safety and danger”, so Pálsson clearly tried to give a strong impression of what climate change might do to us and the nature surrounding us.<sup>42</sup> Ragnhildur Stefánsdóttir’s sculpture “The skin I live in” is less provocative in contrast. The Icelandic artist covered a naked woman’s body with white fur, making her a polar bear woman (Proppé 2015:8). This sculpture, alongside the video installation “Over-Under” is supposed to make the visitor think about what might be below and above the surface. It furthermore expresses that “in order to understand what is happening to our natural environment we must be prepared to go deep into our culture and traditions to rediscover our roots in nature and our connections to animals, glaciers and the water”.<sup>43</sup> The artist hereby suggests that we have lost our roots and live in a modernized world where there is no space to think below the surface anymore. We have lost our connection to nature and therefore have a hard time comprehending the consequences of climate change. The reproach that we live in a modernized world and have lost our roots is one that often is made towards indigenous peoples too as already discussed in chapter 2. “Red Snow” therefore also incorporates and focusses on the Inuit of Greenland as supposedly the only indigenous peoples of the North Atlantic region. As Vigdís Finnbogadóttir said, “Red Snow” makes use of Greenlandic drumming in the form of Pauline Motzfeldt’s work, in order to “rouse those who are still not awake” (Finnbogadóttir 2015:5).

Pauline Motzfeldt, a Greenlandic drum dancer, offered a workshop in drum dancing as part of the “Red Snow” debut in Nuuk. The exhibition in Copenhagen a few months later, then showed a short movie about the workshop at the very beginning of the exhibition. According to the project’s website, Motzfeldt tries to preserve and promote the old Greenlandic traditions of story-telling and drumming. “These traditions are for the Greenlandic people a connection to the time when people had a stronger contact to the living environment and they are an important reminder for people today”, it says there, following Stefánsdóttir’s claim.<sup>44</sup> Also the Greenlandic artist Julia Pars addresses this issue, though she says that we also need to adapt to the changes:

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<sup>42</sup> RED SNOW: “Participants in RED SNOW – ICE IN MOTION” (2015, December 17) [online]. –URL: [http://redsnow.dk/?page\\_id=22](http://redsnow.dk/?page_id=22)

<sup>43</sup> RED SNOW: “Participants in RED SNOW – ICE IN MOTION” (2015, December 17) [online]. –URL: [http://redsnow.dk/?page\\_id=22](http://redsnow.dk/?page_id=22)

<sup>44</sup> RED SNOW: “Participants in RED SNOW – ICE IN MOTION” (2015, December 17) [online]. –URL: [http://redsnow.dk/?page\\_id=22](http://redsnow.dk/?page_id=22)

Greenland, like the rest of the world, is impacted by climate changes. The issue is approached in different ways, but is a local and global condition that we all, in the end, must relate to. I have enhanced my own knowledge about the issue through this project and I have realized, that we must ourselves take action on the climate changes. The Universe contains billions of stars and planets, but none, I think, is like the Earth. It takes only few generations to lose cultural knowledge of value, close contact with nature and native languages. In this rapid change we go through, we must adapt but also protect the uniqueness of our Culture. (Pars 2015:10)

Pars' works "Dream Materialization" and "Dream Catcher" show best what kind of influence climate change has on Greenland and Greenlanders. With "Dream Catcher", Pars uses a black and a white dream catcher, together with the request to the visitor to write down one hope and one fear for the future on a sheet of paper and then throw it in a box. Pars already collected lots of hopes and fears of people when "Red Snow" was exhibited in Nuuk and portrayed some of these in the exhibition in Copenhagen. There was one poster on the wall showing the hopes of some people and right next to it, another poster showing the fears. Pars also pinned some of the note sheets from the visitors in Nuuk on the dream catchers themselves. The hopes and fears people have for the future are various. A woman named Ellen wrote down that she dreamed of being able to change the weather with her index finger and that she saw a whale swimming in the sky. A 13 year old girl named Nathalie on the other hand said that she dreams of a world without pollution while the 9 year old Pipaluk hopes that it will always be nice in Greenland, even when she has grown up. There were a lot of children's hopes and fear exhibited in Copenhagen which shows that apparently even children know about the dangers of climate change already. The 13 year old Filippa, to name another example, said that she wanted to write down two of the most important dreams she had – one was that something will be done against climate change so that the ice will not melt and the earth will not be destroyed more and second, that her family and friends will always be happy and well. The same girl's biggest fear was also exhibited in Copenhagen:

Jeg frygter at isen vil smelte så ville min familie blive meget ked af det, og det ville bare fuldstændig forfærdeligt! Jeg frygter også andet klimaforandring, sådan at ens f.eks. børn ikke er sikre på at kunne få et liv. STOP FORURENING!<sup>45</sup>

Another girl expressed her fear for meeting a polar bear while a woman said that she dreamed of going for a walk and then seeing bones of the old dinosaurs – a while later, she saw the

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<sup>45</sup> My translation: I fear that the ice would melt so my family will be very sad about that, and that would be terrible. I fear also other climate change, so that for example children are not sure to get a life. STOP POLLUTION!



bones of the human race on the side. Two other fears of people who wanted to stay anonymous included “Global warming” and “that life become worse for hunters”.

The artist Julia Pars herself also had a dream about climate change that she processes in her piece “Dream Materialization”. This glass case showed some polar bears walking on green grass while others were lying down on the floor, obviously dead. On the side of the glass case, Pars wrote in Greenlandic and English:

Long time ago I had a dream of white polar bears walking on green grass  
There was no snow or ice  
30 °C  
I was walking among them and they let me

Pars later on thought that she might have been a polar bear herself in that dream. In Greenlandic mythology, the polar bear is the Nordic spirit who possesses wisdom and shamanistic powers.<sup>46</sup> Portraying a dead polar bear thus, says that the old Nordic spirit and thereby Greenlandic traditions are gone. However Pars’ artwork also depicts young polar bears who are still walking around, looking as if they search for an escape route out of the case. This could be put on a level with the young Greenlandic generation trying to preserve the old traditions while adapting to and dealing with modern times. As quoted earlier, Pars calls on everyone to protect but also to adapt to the new world which is exactly what “Dream Materialization” expresses too. Thus while most of the other work in “Red Snow” is handling climate change as the evil, Pars tries to find the good and bad in it. Unlike other artists victimizing indigenous peoples, Pars calls on Greenlanders to fight climate change but also to adapt to the new situation and to find new possibilities. This is also reflected by the impression of the two visitors I was able to interview. The American-Danish couple liked the project a lot and considered the drum dance as something very powerful and Greenlandic people as more progressive than they thought they would be.

This opinion can be considered as another example for that Greenlandic people are often victimized and talked down in the media so that when people with little knowledge on their culture come into contact with Greenland, they are positively surprised and impressed. This is similar to what a woman told me about the exhibition “Greenland Spirit” at the Greenlandic House in Copenhagen. She said that you often only hear the bad news about Greenland in the Danish media so that she was glad to find more positive impressions at the

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<sup>46</sup> RED SNOW: “Participants in RED SNOW – ICE IN MOTION” (2015, December 17) [online]. –URL: [http://redsnow.dk/?page\\_id=22](http://redsnow.dk/?page_id=22)



exhibition. In the following I will therefore analyse the discourse around indigenous peoples in the context of climate change more in-depth.

### 3.3 Climate Crisis Narratives

The idea to create “Greenland Spirit” was born at the United Nations COP 15 Climate Change Conference, thus the project is directly linked to the current discussions around climate change and what it means for Greenland. The project furthermore seems to be influenced by current Greenlandic politics in regards to industrialization and the popular (Western) belief that Greenlanders are the victims of climate change and need to be saved.

The same goes for “Red Snow” – the interdisciplinary project of artists and scientists has a clear opinion about climate change: it threatens the lives of people living in the North and needs to be stopped. In the following I will therefore present and analyse the discourse around indigenous peoples and climate change that is going on today.

Indigenous people are often used as an example in the discussion about climate change. It is being said that global warming is threatening their traditional ways of subsistence and that way also their culture as a whole. Furthermore, indigenous peoples in the Arctic would experience the changes that are occurring much faster than people further south – for once because the Arctic supposedly is where climate change is happening first and second, because indigenous peoples supposedly live closer to nature than other people, as far as common opinions and theories go. According to the anthropologist Lill Rastad Bjørst: “Nearly the only way the Inuit can participate in climate-crisis narratives is by acting as victims or being delegated to speak on behalf of the climate change on a global scale, as both an early warning system and witnesses of climate changes in the Arctic” (Rastad Bjørst 2012:110). Indigenous peoples in general and the Inuit in particular are thus not only used as examples in the media as already portrayed in the introduction to this chapter, but also invited to speak on climate change conferences such as the United Nations COP 15 in Copenhagen. Rastad Bjørst followed two Greenlandic hunters who were invited to speak during this conference and came to the conclusion that the current climate change discourse is grounded in the concept of colonialism and so called *Arcticism* – romanticizing the people living in the North and portraying them as being exotic, close to Edward Said’s term *Orientalism* as already mentioned in chapter 2, and primitivism (Rastad Bjørst 2012:101). Other than primitivism though, Arcticism is a more contemporary concept and even though it is grounded in the old colonial views as described in the last chapter, it is more subtle and also includes the Arctic as a living environment for

indigenous peoples – which the artists behind “Greenland Spirit” and “Red Snow” are so anxious about getting destroyed. They think that the Inuit and their traditional lifestyle are endangered due to climate change but is that really the case?

Rastad Bjørst claims that Greenland today does not actually differ as much from the rest of Europe than it used to: “(...) people in Greenland and the populations of the Western world have never lived more alike than now (e.g. eating breakfast cereal, driving to the office, reading emails, picking up the kids, doing the shopping, playing football and watching the news on television)” (Rastad Bjørst 2012: 109). If the Inuit are not so different from Westerners anymore, why are they being victimized in the context of climate change then? And do they feel as victims themselves?

Rastad Bjørst followed the Greenlandic hunters Johannes Mathæussen and Ville Siegstad at COP 15, who were invited to speak about how climate change has an effect on their life in the small Greenlandic town of Ilulissat. According to Rastad Bjørst, Mathæussen has already been written about and been quoted in newspapers like *The Guardian*, *Aftenposten* and *National Geographic*, where he told about melting ice and new risks (Rastad Bjørst 2012:103). Surprisingly enough, Mathæussen and Siegstad not only talked about the risks of climate change at COP 15 but also about the opportunities it opens up in Greenland, for example mining and oil drilling, which they are in favour of (Rastad Bjørst 2012:104). The two Greenlanders think that the country has to adapt to the changes global warming brings and want their children to get a good education so that they can play a role in re-designing Greenland and thus have a secure future (Rastad Bjørst 2012:104). “They could always be hunters”, they said (Rastad Bjørst 2012:104). Mathæussen and Siegstad thus broke the typical pattern in the discussion around climate change – they did not call for climate change to stop; rather they expressed the need to adapt. “The ‘vulnerable’ were not so vulnerable anyway, and this may really be their way of adapting to climate change – that is, by being pragmatic and making room for new industries” (Rastad Bjørst 2012:105).

These two main topics in the discourse on climate change have been described as “one [tendency] that stresses victimization, and one that stresses creative future-making” by Frank Sejersen, which summarizes what climate change narratives are about pretty well, in my opinion (Sejersen 2015:xii). The exhibition “Greenland Spirit” and “Red Snow” however have chosen the first path - victimization. The message of both exhibitions is clear: stop climate change and save the Greenlandic culture. Many Greenlanders themselves however have a different opinion about their own future. Not only are many Greenlanders glad for the new

opportunities that are opening up, many are even in doubt about whether or not climate change actually is a challenge. Rastad Bjørst explains that many Greenlanders are sceptic of science:

This mistrust is drawn from two controversies: (1) between hunters and biologists in Greenland about whether game and fish populations have decreased or have simply moved away; and (2) over whether the changing climate is due to man-made pollution or just nature's ways, which (many Greenlanders think) we cannot control. (Rastad Bjørst 2012:107)

I find this quote particularly interesting as both exhibitions had been designed together with Greenlandic artists such as Julia Pars for “Red Snow” and Nukâka Coster-Waldau for “Greenland Spirit”. Does that mean that Greenland is divided in those who believe in a man-made climate change and those who do not? Or does this in the end maybe simply mean that there is a difference between Greenlandic artists and Greenlandic hunters – those who still live the traditional ways and those who live a much more Western lifestyle? But then again, are not all Greenlanders hunters and artists anyway (according to Bodil Kaalund, cf. chapter 2)? And what if Greenlandic artists themselves make use of climate change narratives to promote their work? Maybe there are no direct victims of climate change in the end as we all are affected in the same way? After all, the consequences of climate change can be seen all over the world and not just in the Arctic. Farmers elsewhere too experience problems keeping up with their traditional ways but we only label indigenous cultures and lifestyles to be endangered because of climate change. Is that not a form of exoticizing and romanticizing again?

But if the ones who are considered “vulnerable” and “victims” in the dominant climate-crisis narratives really do not feel like that themselves – and in fact, can see opportunities in what climate-crisis narratives consider a “catastrophe” – then who are the vulnerable? Either the climate-crisis narratives are wrong, or they include or produce the wrong kind of witnesses – or, even more interesting, there are no “locals” and no “climate witnesses” who can talk unbiasedly on behalf of the climate. (Rastad Bjørst 2012:109)

Of course, indigenous peoples are a good example to use to put a human face to climate change as their lifestyles are so different from the Western ones and you can more easily detect the changes that are going on in their lives. But what if a Greenlandic hunter does not believe in a man-made climate change and furthermore does not feel like a victim himself? Is it morally acceptable to portray people as victims who do not feel like that themselves?

On another note though, Greenlanders profit from the discussion. As Rastad Bjørst tells us, the two Greenlandic hunters speaking at COP 15 may have been invited as victims and expected to tell their stories, which they happily did, in order to take a part in stopping pollution,

but local politics in Greenland and global politics are two entirely different things (Rastad Bjørst 2012:110). Greenland needs new industries in order to secure its future and therefore “Greenland has the right to develop and (in my words) pollutes as much as it wants to”, Rastad Bjørst claims (Rastad Bjørst 2012:110). However, the argument that Greenlanders just have to adapt is as delicate as the argument that climate change will destroy Greenlandic traditions. As Frank Sejersen claims: “Faced with a veritable procession of challenges, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to maintain the stance that people (just) have to adapt, because the process is neither simple nor linear” (Sejersen 2015:1).

There is no solution or answer to this issue but what the exhibitions “Red Snow” and “Greenland Spirit” at least prove in the end, is that art (and museum) exhibitions are political and have to be analysed with regard to time and place as Ruth B. Phillips already noted (cf. Phillips 2011:67). Exhibitions function as “social reproduction” (cf. Phillips 2011:20) and the two exhibitions that I have analysed in this chapter, are deeply rooted in the discourse on climate change and therefore make use of the typical climate crisis narrative as Rastad Bjørst calls it. To stop climate change is a big aim for an exhibition though – at the very least it can help raise awareness for the topic – but the future will tell whether the efforts of the artists mentioned here have been fruitful.

### **3.4 Summary**

“Greenland Spirit” and “Red Snow” both are concerned with climate change and its effect on Greenland and Inuit culture. The exhibitions are an effort to stop climate change so that Greenlandic traditions can be secured for the future. They both draw on climate crisis narratives in this process – or in other words, exoticize and romanticize Greenlanders even though Greenland today does not differ too much from the rest of Europe in many regards. There furthermore is an ongoing discussion in Greenland about whether or not man-made climate change actually exists and many hunters think that change in nature is absolutely normal and something they need to adapt to. Greenlanders themselves thus do not see themselves as victims of climate change as for example Western media but also “Greenland Spirit” and “Red Snow” promote. It is interesting to note that Greenlandic artists have been involved in both exhibitions, even though opinions on climate change vary in the country. Whatever the truth about climate change and its effect on Greenlandic culture may look like, in the end it brings attention to the country which is much needed if Greenlanders want to live in an independent country in the future.

## **4. A (Post) Modern Country: Greenland on its Way to Independence?**

In many respects, Greenland today hardly differs from any other European country. The country is currently experiencing an industrial boom due to the changing climate and also a boom in tourism as the country has become easier to reach – both figuratively, through internet access, but also literally through the establishment of tourist centres and cheaper flight connections. Skyscrapers and hoover boards not only deck out the streets of Copenhagen but also the streets of Nuuk which is more and more becoming a much more modern version of its bigger Danish sister. All in all, Greenland hardly resembles the pictures of the old days of hunters in fur clothing and small wooden huts. Brand clothing and modern apartment blocks now characterize the street view of Nuuk or Sisimiut and more and more Greenlanders want their country to become independent from Denmark.

In this time, also the representation of Greenlanders is slowly starting to change. One-sided views of threatened Inuit hunters make way for self-confident representations of a people that is so much stronger than the media in Denmark would dare to admit. The photographer Julie Edel Hardenberg for example published a book called “The Quiet Diversity” in 2005 where she portrays how diverse and even multicultural Greenland really is today. She presents, amongst others, pictures of Asian restaurants in a snowy landscape or the menu of a restaurant offering kebab and burgers or portraits of dark-skinned children in Inuit clothing and portraits of interracial families.

It is therefore of no surprise that a country that is as (post) modern and multicultural as most other European states wants to independently handle its own affairs and free itself from its former colonial master Denmark. Greenland had been under Danish rule since the union between Norway and Denmark dissolved in 1814 and in 1953 lost its official status of a colony to become an autonomous region of Denmark (Lauridsen 2015:199-201). In 1979 then, home rule was introduced to the country after a vote and Greenland got its own parliament to decide on matters of culture, health and education (Lauridsen 2015:203). Greenland is self-ruled since 2009 which means that the country technically has the right to decide in all of its political matters but since the introduction only has overtaken the control for resources and industry (Lauridsen 2015:204). The right to decide on security and foreign affairs remains with Denmark though (Lauridsen 2015:204).

Since the introduction of self-rule, the wish for independence of the country though has gotten bigger in the Greenlandic society. More and more people want the country to be

independent from Denmark which mainly means to become economically independent (Lauridsen 2015:206). This thus means that new industries need to be developed as Greenland for the time being still is dependent on Denmark for financial subsidiaries and only has fishery as a source for state income. Industries like mining and oil drilling would bring money into the country and help make it financially independent even though those industries have a negative impact on the environment and are criticized harshly by many Greenlandic artists, for example Bolatta Silis-Høegh, who exhibited at Nuuk Art Museum or Julia Pars who participated in “Red Snow”.

In fact, artists who are being engaged in the discourse around climate change are often also involved in the debate about mining and new industries in Greenland and see the development as rather negative. However new discourses are emerging, born in the need for more neutral and diverse views on Greenland and Greenlanders. The following exhibitions “Inuit Now” and “Jette Bang i dialog” are examples of such attempts as they both try to paint a picture of Greenland as it is today but do not use any of the narratives that have characterized exhibitions about Greenland before. These two exhibitions aim to portray Greenland as a modern country with self-confident people which perfectly fits to current efforts of many Greenlanders to become independent from Denmark. In the following I will therefore present and analyse the exhibitions “Inuit Now” and “Jette Bang i dialog” and put them into context with the current political situation in Greenland.

#### **4.1 “Inuit Now”: Øksnehallen, Copenhagen**

“Inuit Now” is a photographic project of the two Danish photojournalists Dennis Lehmann and Lasse Bak Mejlvang. Lehmann and Mejlvang both travelled to Greenland in 2014 where Lehmann then spent a month in the Upernavik District while Mejlvang went to Sisimiut for that time. Their aim was to capture the life and identity of Inuit in Western Greenland today and the two photographers travelled to two different places to contrast life in the city of Sisimiut with life in a small village in Upernavik with each other. While with about 6000 inhabitants, Sisimiut is a city according to Greenlandic standards, where many of the inhabitants are young people attending school and college, the little village of Tasiusaq where Dennis Lehmann spent his time, only has about 250 inhabitants and most people are hunters or fishermen. Tasiusaq thus is a sedate and isolated little village while Sisimiut is the place most young people from the North-West Coast move to and thus rather a pulsating little city.

Lehmann and Mejlvang tried to capture the essence of both places through photography, trying to do away with prejudices and presenting a more varied image of the places and their people. The two published their findings as a photo exhibition that was shown at Katuaq in Nuuk, Ilulissat Art Museum and Taseralik Cultural Centre in Sisimiut. In June 2015 they then exhibited “Inuit Now” in Copenhagen as part of the annual Copenhagen Photo Festival and also published a book under the same title to complete the exhibition.

“Inuit Now” was exhibited at the event centre Øksnehallen in the former meatpacking district of Copenhagen from June 11 until July 29, in cooperation with the Photographic Centre of Copenhagen which was exhibiting “Jette Bang i dialog”, another photo exhibition about Greenland that I will get back to later on, at the same time. The project did not end with the events in Copenhagen though, as Lehmann and Mejlvang planned for “Inuit Now” to be a five year project and want to capture life in the Arctic further in the years to come.

#### **4.1.1 Contrasts**

I visited “Inuit Now” at Øksnehallen in Copenhagen in July 2015. Øksnehallen is a multi-purpose venue for conferences, exhibitions and other events. The 5000 square meter big hall can be divided into smaller rooms so that several exhibitions or events can take place at the same time. When I visited Øksnehallen to see “Inuit Now”, that was the case. The exhibition took place in a smaller compartment of the event hall, with curtains to divide the exhibition from the rest of the venue. The exhibition venue of “Inuit Now” itself was a small unit with several separating walls in between on which the photographs were situated, which meant that the visitor basically had to walk in a circle around the small room to see every picture. At the beginning of the venue, you could find information posters, telling about the exhibition and the two photographers, and also a contribution wall with the names of everyone who donated to the project. The exhibition was entitled “Inuit Now – A project about life and identity in Western Greenland” on the very first exhibition wall.

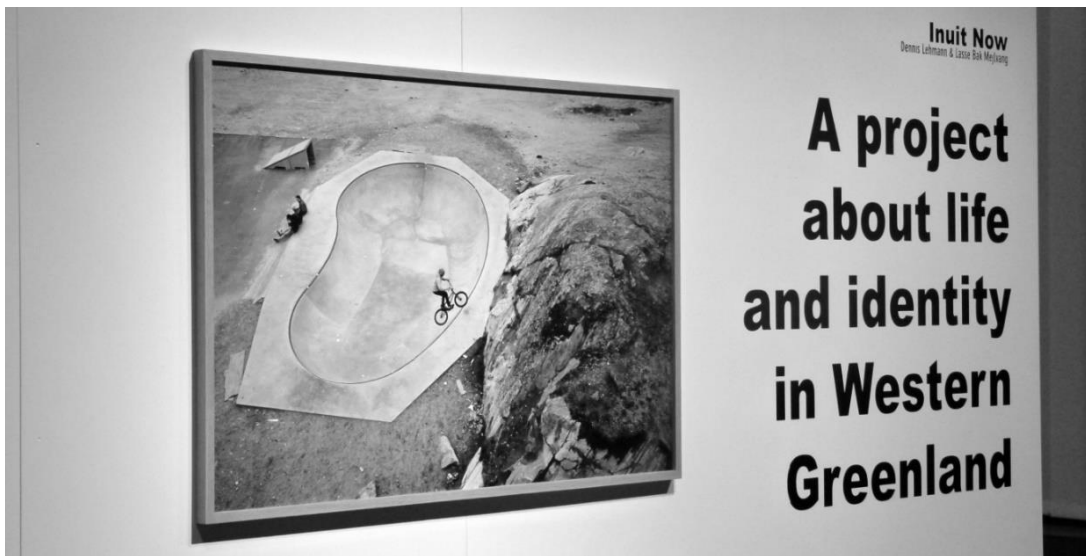


Figure 14 – Entrance to “Inuit Now” at Øksnehallen

This was followed by several smaller compartments, created by white walls, where the pictures were attached to these same walls, either as sole prints or framed in wood. Next to the pictures you could also find some quotations, which obviously seemed to come from the people Lehmann and Mejlvang spoke to during their stay, even though there was no information on these people whatsoever. The quotations were anonymous and stood for themselves, though it was possible to put them into context and imagine what the person who said this must be like, i.e. whether it was a youth or a fisherman for example. “Do we have to leave already? It’s 5 am, the fridge is not empty and we only had one game of beer pong so far”, obviously a quote of a young person, was put into contrast with the words of a fisherman: “Damned seals. They are eating our fish”.

Other quotes show that life in Greenland is slower than life in the rest of Europe, but also that it is more difficult for teenagers in Greenland as they do not have the same access to free-time activities as teenagers in Denmark for example and thus, have to come up with something else: “I missed the silence and the presence. In Nuuk you don’t know your neighbor, you don’t even say hi in the streets. In Tasiusaq, I know everybody” and “When the can of cocktail sausages exploded, I thought I was on fire. Maybe it was a bad idea to test how long it could stay in the fire”.

That “Inuit Now” uses contrasts to show the diversity of modern day Greenland can also be seen in the pictures. The photographs of Dennis Lehmann from Tasiusaq are in colour whereas the photos of Lasse Bak Mejlvang from Sisimiut are in black and white. There was no particular order of the photographs though – that is to say, the pictures from Sisimiut and Tasiusaq were not exhibited in their own units but together to contrast each other. Thus, black



and white photographs were attached next to colourful photographs and pictures of landscapes were attached next to portraits.



Figure 15 – On the left: *Untitled (Sisimiut, 2014)* by Lasse Bak Mejlvang. In the middle: *Untitled (Tasiusaq, 2014)* by Dennis Lehmann. On the right: *Untitled (Sisimiut, 2014)* by Lasse Bak Mejlvang

The visitor went from one corner to another and looked at all kinds of different photographs. From a young woman dressed in a fur hoodie, with dark black make-up around her eyes to fishermen at work, women caring for their babies and teenagers hanging out. There also were photographs you would not necessarily think of in the context of Greenland: a girl going for a walk with two rabbits on the leash, a rock next to the street with the name of the metal band “Slipknot” written on, and finally, the arm of someone with the words “MONEY ON MY MIND” written with a permanent marker.



Figure 16 – *Untitled (Sisimiut, 2014)* by Lasse Bak Mejlvang

There were also landscape pictures which showed the environment the people portrayed live in – from apartment blocks to small wooden houses on a hill above the ocean. At the very end of the exhibition venue, there was a huge landscape picture attached to a curtain, showing a fjord during summertime with icebergs floating by and a blue house at the waterside. There were also two sofas with the book to the exhibition attached so that the visitor could have a look at the pictures again or read more on what the photographers had aimed for. The text in the book, as well as in the information brochures and the exhibition itself, was solely in English. What that might tell about the aim of the exhibition and what one of the photographers, Dennis Lehmann, himself thinks about it, will be topic of the next section.

#### 4.1.2 A Wider Picture

“Inuit Now” is an exhibition full of contrasts: black and white pictures versus colourful pictures; pictures from the city versus pictures from the countryside; pictures from young teenagers acting like their peers from less remote places versus pictures of Inuit fishermen still using rather traditional techniques at work. As mentioned earlier, the aim of “Inuit Now” was to present a more diverse image of Greenlanders and the information brochure that accompanied the exhibition says:

Together, these highly individual works of the two photographers combine to create not a single, monolithic vision, but rather a diverse and fragmented portrait of a people that is everything but the simple and often polarised representation in a national and international news media. The humble life of the fishermen in the North is juxtaposed and mixed with the flourishing pulse of the youth in Sisimiut, thereby creating a heterogenous narrative of a paradoxical place that can be very difficult to understand by outsiders. (Information poster: “Inuit Now – Introduction”)

The overall aim of Dennis Lehmann and Lasse Bak Mejlvang thus was to create a picture of Greenlanders that is as diverse as the people themselves and furthermore free of stereotypes, to the extent possible. In other words, they tried to map Greenlanders.

In “Inuit Now” – the book to the exhibition, the two photographers write: “Ask anyone around you to describe an Inuit and they will probably tell you about indigenous hunters or drunks, neither of which is true. *Inuit* is simply Inuktitut for people. But how do you map a people?” (Lehmann 2015).

In an interview with Dennis Lehmann in August 2015 I asked him about those common stereotypes and clichés and he told me that even his own pictures contain some clichés, at least in his opinion. Both Lehmann and Mejlvang had been to Greenland before starting out with

“Inuit Now”, though not to Upernavik. When planning on where to go for the project, Lehmann got inspired by the pictures of the Danish photographer Jette Bang<sup>47</sup>, who took most of her pictures in the Upernavik district as that was the area where she found “her picture of Greenland”, Lehmann said. Furthermore, Upernavik is rarely ever talked about in Danish or international media. If the place is mentioned in Denmark, then most probably only when the Danish Queen is visiting. The same goes for international media. There, Upernavik is mostly mentioned in the context of catastrophes or to tell about the environment – the American military base at Thule and the B-52 crash that happened there in the 1960s or climate change are examples for such broadcasting. However, the people that are living there are rarely talked about and that is why Lehmann decided to portray the everyday life of people in Upernavik.

However he admitted in a Skype interview that his pictures look “literally exactly like the ones that Jette Bang took one hundred years ago, except that it is different people and that they have different clothes on”. Lehmann said that this was not planned but that it just happened unintentionally and that the two photographers still hope to break down some clichés with the exhibition, which in my view, they succeeded with. The pictures of Lehmann, resembling the work of Jette Bang in a small settlement in the North-West of Greenland, show that many Greenlanders still live the traditional way of life and that not that much has changed since Jette Bang, while Mejlvang with his pictures of teenagers in Sisimut shows that teenagers in Greenland today are actually not very different from teenagers elsewhere. In a time where Greenland is mostly talked about abroad in the context of climate change, while Greenlanders themselves are more interested in the development of new industries that could make the country independent one day, the project “Inuit Now” clearly shows that Greenland is a diverse country with many traditions but also with many modern influences and that it is very difficult to narrow life in Greenland down to just one topic, like climate change. That is actually what the two photographers wanted to achieve with the project – to present Greenland in a more diverse way.

The two first started out working on Greenland as a topic in photography separately – Mejlvang planning to capture the youth culture of Sisimiut and Lehmann looking for a topic for his graduation project at the Danish School for Media and Journalism, before the two decided to join forces in order to “show a wider picture of Inuit culture”, as Lehmann put it. With their project they aimed to establish a dialogue between Denmark and Greenland but also among rural and urban Greenland itself. Therefore their audience would be “whoever thinks

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<sup>47</sup> Jette Bang lived between 1914 and 1964 and got famous for her photographs and films about Greenland.

dialogue and Inuit culture is interesting”, Dennis Lehman said. That could be Danes, Greenlanders or anyone from any place in the world which would be the reason why the exhibition, as well as the book, is in English instead of Danish or Greenlandic.

When being asked about the main message of the project then, Lehmann’s answer was “Talk together”. He said that only if we talk together, we can make solutions. If we do not talk together and are isolated from each other though, we fight a lot more. In regards to the relationship between Denmark and Greenland, Lehmann said that even though the two are very far from each other, they still are very close, even if that has its reason in history and colonisation. Therefore it would be good if people talked more and moved closer to each other – within Greenland itself but also between Denmark and Greenland. This could lead to problems in society, often originating from stereotypes, being solved.

In regards to a possible independence from Greenland, dialogue definitely is the key – not just between Greenlanders themselves in order to reach unity but also between Greenlanders and Danes in order to not destroy a relationship between two countries that took many centuries to establish and still is somewhat fragile. The first step to a new discourse about Greenland is made with “Inuit Now” at least. The project has been written about not only in the Greenlandic and Danish media but even in the US. *The New Yorker* presented the project in 2015 with the title “Two Sides of Life in Greenland” while *The Washington Post* in the same year focused on Lasse Bak Mejlvang’s pictures of teenagers in Sisimiut in an article entitled “The young dreamers at the centre of West Greenland’s energy boomtown”, telling about this fastest growing city at the West Coast and its chances for economy, inhabitants and youths for the future.

The question “Where is Greenland heading now?”<sup>48</sup> remains but answers might be found in the next volume of “Inuit Now” as Lehmann and Mejlvang are planning to visit and capture Greenland once again.

## **4.2 “Jette Bang i dialog”: The Photographic Centre, Copenhagen**

“Jette Bang i dialog” was, like Dennis Lehmann and Lasse Bak Mejlvang’s “Inuit Now”, opened during Copenhagen Photo Festival in June 2015 and exhibited at Øksnehallen’s Building No. 55, just around the corner from Lehmann and Mejlvang’s exhibition. As the

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<sup>48</sup> Homepage of Dennis Lehmann: Inuit Now #1 – Upernavik  
<http://dennislehmann.com/index.php/project/inuitnu-1---upernavik/>

former, “Jette Bang i dialog” too is a photographic exhibition about life in Greenland – though contrasting the now and then of the country.

The exhibition presents the works of the Danish photographer Jette Bang who was the first photographer to be interested in Greenlanders themselves in a time when most other works almost solely showed Greenlandic culture in general, so for example hunting gear or housing. Jette Bang, who lived between 1914 and 1964, travelled to Greenland for the first time in 1936 and returned for 6 more times to capture the life of the people all over the country (Johnsen 2014:40). She has been to Western and Eastern Greenland but also to Thule in the Upernavik district and her collection of photographs and films from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is still regarded as one of the most important visual representations of Greenland today. Her pictures show mothers breast-feeding their babies, teachers educating children and hunters fishing on the ice. These pictures still show relatively ancient, traditional Greenlandic culture before modernisation and are therefore very important to the country. While Jette Bang's work has mostly been regarded as ethnographic, the exhibition “Jette Bang i dialog” focuses on the aesthetic aspects of her work for the first time. In the exhibition, Jette Bang's pictures are shown in contrast with pictures of young Greenlandic photographers today, namely Angu Motzfeldt, Jukke Rosing and Inuuteq Storch. These photographers captured the everyday in Greenland too – only 50 years later. They show for example a kayak hanging from a balcony of an apartment block, someone wearing a pair of fur boots on public transport and portraits of young Greenlandic women. “Jette Bang i dialog” was organized by the Photographic Centre of Copenhagen with the aim to provide a space for modern and historical depictions of Greenland that are by and large free of typical stereotypes or clichés. The exhibition was open from June 5<sup>th</sup> 2015 to August 16<sup>th</sup> and I had the opportunity of visiting it in July.

#### **4.2.1 Greenland now and then**

“Jette Bang i dialog” took place in an exhibition venue of the old meatpacking district of Copenhagen. The venue itself was a light, open hall with space for hundreds of pictures and a reception and bookshop next to the entrance, as well as a TV and chairs on the other side of the entrance where Jette Bang's movie “Inuit” from 1940 was shown.

The focus of the exhibition though were clearly Jette Bang's pictures – they created the centre of the exhibition both figuratively and literally. There were 3 big dash panels in the middle of the hall, all showing pictures of Jette Bang. The first one was created as a long wall right opposite the entrance so that the pictures of Jette Bang were the first thing the visitors

saw upon entering. About 30 pictures were situated on that wall - all framed and mainly showing landscapes from a fjord filled with ice floes, to mountains and settlements with wooden houses. A few pictures also featured Greenlanders though, for example a family dressed in traditional fur clothing all sitting on the bed at home or employees of a shop working at the counter.

Next to this wall on the left side upon entering, Jette Bang's movie "Inuit" was shown for the visitors which captured the life of an Inuit clan in Northern Greenland in the different seasons of the year, showing how an igloo was built in winter, how seals were caught and fur clothing produced, how the Greenlanders travelled by umiaq to their summer settlement and finally, how they built turf huts for their stay there.

On a wall next to the screening, there was some information about the exhibition in Danish and English, telling about Jette Bang and the three contributing photographers Angu Motzfeldt, Juuke Rosing and Inuuteq Storch, as well as the sponsors of the exhibition.

Next up were already the photographs of the young Greenlandic photographer Inuuteq Storch. His pictures show stains of possibly urine on the street, a portrait of a man looking at his phone while he is being watched by a passenger and the figure of someone holding a purple umbrella.



*Figure 17 - Miscellaneous photographs taken by Jette Bang between 1936 and 1962, now belonging to The Danish Arctic Institute*



Continuing in the exhibition, there were two glass cases with slides of Jette Bang and one more wall with her pictures framed. The slides mainly show people at work – hunters on the ocean or the ice, teachers in a classroom, women gutting a seal or working on a kayak.

The opposing walls then mainly showed pictures that were taken outside: pictures of icebergs, pictures of hunters in kayaks, children playing, a portrait of a young girl smiling, women working on gutting seals, children next to a dead reindeer, a child with his infant sibling on the back, a group of 4 young women in their traditional clothing and finally a family in their home and a family sharing a bed. The wall contained more than 50 black and white pictures, taken by Jette Bang between 1936 and 1962, along with some information about Bang herself.

Further on in the exhibition, you could find the pictures of Angu Motzfeldt and Jukke Rosing next to and opposite of 20 more slides from Jette Bang – this time, portraits of Greenlanders from children to elderly persons, young men and women, hunters, mothers with their children and children with their siblings. Some of the pictures from Angu Motzfeldt were directly connected to the work of Jette Bang. He for example captured an infant on his mother’s chest. He also captured the kayak at an apartment block and the pair of fur boots on public transport I already mentioned.



*Figure 18 – On the left: “Qajaq” by Angu Motzfeldt. On the right: “Not just for show” by Angu Motzfeldt.*

Jukke Rosing, the only female photographer of the three contributors, exhibited the portraits of three young Greenlandic women in “Jette Bang i dialog”. The women all look out into the distance, with the sky in the background, and seem pretty confident which seems to be in accordance with the personality of Jette Bang herself. This however, along with why this exhibition is so important for Greenland, will be topic of the next section.

#### 4.2.2 A Cultural Heritage

When Jette Bang travelled to Greenland for the first time, she was only 22 years old. During that first journey though she already laid the groundwork though for something that would later be described as “cultural heritage” (Johnsen 2014:31). The eskimologist and author of *Jette Bang – From the Belly of the Polar Bear*, Leise Johnsen, describes the work of Bang as “a historical document that also happens to contain the first professional photographic art works from Greenland” (Johnsen 2014:31).

When Jette Bang travelled to Greenland in 1936, she had just finished her photography apprenticeship in Copenhagen and aimed to work with the Administration of Greenland to establish a photo archive (Johnsen 2014:34). Bang knew that Greenland was undergoing some great changes at that time that would lead to the traditional ways being lost and therefore she wanted to document as much of this old culture as possible (Johnsen 2014:36). She said about her goals:

The first time I travelled out because I wanted to make a thorough photographic record of Greenland, when I came home I had a lot to tell and many pictures to show, but I had to go up there one more time to complete the job, I thought. The result was six long journeys, over one winter and seven summers, and the archive is not finished yet. It never will be, because Greenland is a multitude of things, and I am not the kind of person who would dare to paint a finished picture of it. (IN: *Jette Bang i dialog* by Fotografisk Center)

Greenland as it is today can be described as a blend of the old and the new and therefore it only made sense to portray Jette Bang’s photographs with the work of contemporary Greenlandic artists. In a talk with Kit Vaitt Jensen, the curator of the Photographic Centre of Copenhagen, I learned that the overall goal of “Jette Bang i dialog” was for visitors to learn more about Greenland today – a today that could not exist without the past and that is why the pictures of Greenland from Jette Bang are still as important for the country as they were 50 years ago. If you want to understand contemporary issues in the Greenlandic society, you have to look back and see where the issues might have originated. Jette Bang’s pictures contribute a great deal to this discourse by showing what the life of Greenlanders was like during colonisation. The younger Greenlandic artists Motzfeldt, Rosing and Storch in contrast portray what the life of Greenlanders is like today – and this in a quite unexpected way:

The first thing that strikes the eye is that the Greenlandic life presented here does not differ greatly from the life we know in Denmark. Viewed through the intimate camera, Greenland is a place where people dwell and live their lives, and where they are not about to succumb to social misery. Now that these new works are being given a place side by side with Jette



Bang's works, one of the most important foundation stones has been laid for a larger, more diverse narrative about the universal in the alien. (IN: *Jette Bang i dialog* by Fotografisk Center)

#### And further:

It is still through the outsider's camera that we mainly see the country. Journalists, filmmakers, photographers and writers still travel north and send reports home to the Danish public from their journeys of discovery. Today it is the magnificent landscape pictures, ice and sea, the meat and fish markets and the Greenlanders viewed from a distance; or it is the tragic picture of a population where incompetent and corrupt politicians attempt to govern, and of a culture that is well on its way to drowning in alcoholism, violence and suicide. This one-sided view arises because for various reasons the camera lens that is pointed at Greenland does not search and perhaps does not ask, but instead skims the surface as if over a mirror. Behind the camera is a gaze that seems only to dwell on whatever can confirm the narratives already established. It is a prejudicial gaze which can perhaps be explained by simple laziness that blinds the photographer to what is 'alien'; but which also perhaps builds on an unconscious wish to reproduce the story of the incapable Greenlander in order to legitimize colonial practice – a practice that many Danes are not comfortable with today.

As we already saw in the analysis of exhibitions like “Red Snow” and “Greenland Spirit” and of the National Museums of both, Greenland and Denmark, narratives about Greenland still contain stereotypes and depict Greenlandic culture in a very one-sided or superficial way. The complexity of the country and its society rarely ever is shown and instead one focuses on one or two central aspects of what ones believes to be important to Greenlandic culture – the traditional hunting lifestyle or climate change for example. It is often forgotten that Greenland is much more than this and like every other country in Europe has at some point, experiences the rise of multiculturalism and industrial booms.

“Jette Bang i dialog” thus criticizes the way Greenland is being portrayed in Denmark today and like “Inuit Now” tries to establish new narratives. The overall aim of both exhibitions would be to raise awareness for what Greenland actually is like today and contribute to the country becoming, either fully or at least more, independent from Denmark which is something I will talk about in depth in the upcoming sub-chapter.

### **4.3 (Post) Colonialism**

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, there has been a growing wish of Greenlanders to become independent from Denmark since the introduction of home rule in the 1970s and even more so since the introduction of self-rule in 2009. This wish, however, is often times

perceived negatively in Denmark and many Danes therefore think of the Greenlanders as ungrateful. To be independent in Denmark seems to mean to cut the relations completely, while Greenlanders simply wish to be financially independent and keep up a good relationship to their former colonial master (Lauridsen 2015:206). Also, people in Denmark seem to know too little about their former colony and this could also be a reason as to why the wish for Greenland's independence can be perceived as rude or ungrateful in Denmark. As the journalist Martin Breum says:

Hvordan skal man som dansker begribe, at rigtigt mange grønlandere ønsker sig et langt mere selvstændigt Grønland? Hvordan skal man begribe, at mange grønlandere har et andet billede af vores 300 års fælles historie, end det billede mange danskere har?

Jeg har i nogle år forsøgt at afkode de to spørgsmål, der rækker ind i kernen af den grønlandske politiske diskussion. Jeg har bestemt ikke nået nogen klarhed, men jeg har da fundet ud af én ting: Vi danskere er bagud på point! Langt de fleste danskere ved ganske enkelt alt for lidt om Grønland. (Lauridsen 2015:208)<sup>49</sup>

What is the view Danes have of Greenland though? And what do Greenlanders think of Denmark? The exhibitions “Inuit Now” and “Jette Bang i dialog” both describe that Greenland is either not visible in Danish media, or at least not often enough, or that there often is painted a wrong and stereotypical picture of the country, characterized by alcoholism and violence. Moreover, even though Greenland has not been a colony of Denmark since 1953, Danes still make up a high percentage of the work force in the country, especially when it comes to higher positions, and therefore many Greenlanders feel like their country is still being ruled by Danes. Martin Breum cites Mininnguaq Kleist, a politician of the Greenlandic self-rule government and later head of office for Greenland's foreign affairs<sup>50</sup>, in his work *Balladen om Grønland* where he writes about Greenland's efforts to become independent. He quotes:

De grønlandske inuitter har været og er stadig i høj grad domineret af danskerne i Grønland. I dag udgør de grønlandske inuitter alene den politiske elite, mens de fleste af de højest rangerende embedsmænd både i de lokale og i den centrale administration er danskere. De fleste entreprenører og forretningsfolk er danskere. Mange lærere, hvis ikke de fleste, i uddannelsessystemet er danskere. Alt det betyder, at danskerne influerer og dominerer det

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<sup>49</sup> “How shall you as a Dane understand that so many Greenlanders wish for a more independent Greenland? How shall you understand that many Greenlanders have a different view on our 300 years of common history than the view many Danes have? I have in many years tried to decode these two questions that reach the inner point of the Greenlandic political discussion. I certainly have not found any clarity but I did find out one thing: We Danes are behind in points! Most of the Danes simply know too little about Greenland.”

<sup>50</sup> According to *The Guardian* in 2010: <http://www.theguardian.com/profile/mininnguaq-kleist>

grønlandske samfund i langt højere grad end deres antal retfærdiggør. (Mininnguaq Kleist in Breum 2014:25)<sup>51</sup>

It is not possible to count exactly how many Danes are living in Greenland as not only they themselves but also Greenlanders only have a Danish passport, but it is estimated that there are about 5000 Danes and about 49000 Greenlanders living in Greenland plus about 1000 people from other countries (Lauridsen 2015:75, 97-98). If the 5000 Danes then make up most of the positions in the education and business sector, it is easily understandable that many Greenlanders still feel dominated by them and want to take matters into their own hands. Even further, the whole colonisation process is suddenly being questioned. The prime minister of Greenland, Aleqa Hammond, for example asks the following:

Hvad ville danskerne egentlig i Grønland? Skete koloniseringen af hensyn til grønlandernes og Grønlands bedring? Har grønlanderne grund til at takke danskerne for hjælpen – for kristendommens indførelse, og alt hvad den bragte med sig? Eller udnyttede danskerne Grønland og grønlanderne for egen vindings skyld – om nødvendigt med magt? Var Danmarks kolonisering, som den tidligere diplomat Finn Lyng hævdede, enestående i verdenshistorien, fordi ingen blev henrettet i kongens navn, eller var det en alt for pæn udlægning af de faktiske forhold? (Breum 2014:120)<sup>52</sup>

If the prime minister of Greenland asks questions like these, you can roughly imagine what the current political situation in Greenland in regard to the country's independence is like. Greenlanders want to decide on their own how the future of the country should be like and the two exhibitions "Inuit Now" and "Jette Bang i dialog" support this discourse. "Inuit Now" tries to portray urban and rural Greenland as it really is today – without using the clichés of the Inuit hunter or the threatened Inuit in times of climate change. Dennis Lehmann and Lasse Bak Mejlvang went to Greenland because they saw a lack of news coverage that did not centre around issues such as climate change or problems in society. They, like Martin Breum, also think that Danes know too little about Greenland and wanted to contribute to a wider discourse about the country. They wanted their exhibition to reflect the diversity of Greenland which is

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<sup>51</sup> "The Greenlandic Inuit have been and still are dominated by Danes in Greenland on a high level. The Greenlandic Inuit only make up the political elite today, while most of the higher ranked office holders both on the local level and in the central administration, are Danes. Most of the entrepreneurs and business people are Danes. Many teachers in the education system, if not most of them, are Danes. All of that means that the Danes influence and dominate the Greenlandic society on a much higher level than their number would justify."

<sup>52</sup> "What did the Danes actually want in Greenland? Did colonisation happen for the betterment of the Greenlanders and Greenland? Do the Greenlanders have a reason to thank the Danes for their help – for the introduction of Christianity and everything this brought with it? Or did the Danes exploit Greenland and the Greenlanders for their own profit – if necessary with force? Was Denmark's colonisation, as the former diplomat Finn Lyng claimed, unique in the world's history because no one was executed in the name of the King, or was this a way too nice interpretation of the actual conditions?"

a central aspect in the debate about the country's independence: not everyone is in favour of Greenland becoming independent and not everyone thinks that an independence is realistic in the near future. What unites opponents and supporters though is the wish to create a better future for the country and make Greenland stronger. "Inuit Now" shows exactly that – the portrait of a country that is inhabited by a proud and strong people.

"Jette Bang i dialog" also fits in the debate around Greenland's independence. First and foremost as the exhibition connects the past with the present and has the overall goal of educating people, and especially Danes, of what Greenland really is like today. The exhibition tried to encourage people to think about past and current representations of the country and maybe even helped in some overcoming their prejudices. The relationship between Greenland and Denmark is not the best, and never has been, but exhibitions like "Jette Bang i dialog" can help to improve it through a better understanding of both parties among themselves. Even though an independent Greenland is possible, this does not mean that it will break the relations between the two countries. Quite the contrary, it might improve them as it removes and simplifies responsibilities and regulations leading to the countries feeling less stressed about each other which might also improves the way Danes think about Greenlanders. The stereotype of the alcoholic Greenlander living from Danish tax money, for example, could fade away. That still seems to be in the distant future though. For now, exhibitions like "Inuit Now" and "Jette Bang i dialog" provide a more cliché-free dialogue about Greenland which at least is a step in the right direction.

#### **4.4 Greenlandic (Post) Modernity**

The current political discourse in Greenland focuses a lot on the relationship to Denmark and the question of whether or not Greenland should become independent. In Denmark, the term colonisation alludes to force and violence, and as the colonisation of Greenland is presumed not to be a violent one, the country is mostly perceived as a part of Denmark or a Danish "dependency" (Petersen 1995:119). A common definition of a colony however is an area that is used by a third party for political and economic purposes (Petersen 1995:119). Considering the fact that Greenland was fully ruled by Denmark until 1979, and that Danes held and still hold the majority of high status and well-paying jobs, while Greenlanders struggle to receive a good education in their own country, and many have to move to Denmark to attend schools, Denmark definitely was, and still is to a certain degree, the colonial power of Greenland. Denmark has not been a violent colonial power though – instead it was and is patriarchal.

It was commonly said that any Dane working in Greenland “had come in order to help the Greenlanders.” It was an old idea of the colonial civil servants that they had to do tasks which “the Greenlanders” could not manage for themselves. For some reason this kind of argument was not used by the new civil servants in the beginning of the modernization period, maybe because the majority of them were new to Greenland and because Greenland officially was no longer a colony. But in fact, the idea never disappeared. In this way, the most traditional colonial way of justifying one’s presence and privileges developed after the official end of the colonial period. This indicates that the colonial situation *de facto* continued. (Petersen 1995:121)

Those Danes coming to Greenland to do good surely were rewarded for their efforts. Housing was easily made available for them and wages were at least 15% higher than those Greenlanders would get (Petersen 1995:121). It therefore hardly is a surprise that Denmark still has not fully recognized its being in Greenland as colonisation. After all, in the view of many Danes, they were *needed* and only did *good*. The more complex consequences of Danish influence on Greenland are rarely mentioned and as I described, not even the National Museum of the country talks about its time as colonial power.

Within the last year, the affairs of Greenland have increasingly surfaced in Danish public and political debates. This has exposed a general lack of awareness about Danish colonial history and revealed Danish hegemonic attitudes towards Greenland. From my experience, Danish national narratives ignore Denmark’s history as a colonial power and its consequences. For example, when I was taught about colonialism in primary and secondary school, I mainly learned about the colonial empires of Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Spain. However, little was said about Denmark’s role as a colonial exploiter in Greenland, Iceland, the Faeroe Islands, the West Indies, India and Africa. In fact, I learned that Denmark had been a “benign” colonial power in Greenland; we did not enslave the Indigenous population, and we did not implement physical punishment. I learned that Denmark helped Greenlanders to alleviate the miseries of tuberculosis and poverty, even though I did not learn how these phenomena were related to Danish colonialism. I did not learn about Danish colonial policies, the complications arising from these, or the very exploitative and problematic nature of colonialism. I argue that these silences and inaccuracies in Danish national narratives constitute a major gap in the everyday consciousness of Danes, and remain to be challenged. (Dyrendom Graugaard 2009:2-3)

The Greenlandic-Danish playwright and researcher Naja Dyrendom Graugaard makes a very important point here: diseases such as tuberculosis only became wide-spread in the country because of the presence of the Danes and poverty only became a problem after the introduction of the Danish system (i.e. financial economy) into the country. In other words, Greenlanders were not dependent on Danes to begin with – they only became so over the course of Danization

(cf. Petersen 1995:121). This process however did not result in making Greenlanders to Danes or Greenland an equal part of Denmark. Quite on the contrary, Greenlanders vehemently distinguish themselves from everything Danish. Being Greenlandic, for example, is hereditary – children of Danish parents who were born in Greenland are still considered to be Danish. You are only considered to be Greenlandic if at least one of your parents is Greenlandic too, as the political scientist Ulrik Pram Gad states (Pram Gad 2009:141).

Furthermore, Greenlanders who have lived in Denmark for a while can be criticized for being too Danish upon returning to their home country but then again, will always be seen as Greenlanders in Denmark (Pram Gad 2009:141). This leads to a conflict of identity for many Greenlanders – a problem that not only originates in the juxtaposition of two cultures but also in the juxtaposition of traditional culture and modernization (Pram Gad 2009:142). As Pram Gad puts it, “Modern, urban life is basically excluded from Greenlandic identity, even if most Greenlanders actually live in cities” (Pram Gad 2009:141).

Naja Dyrendom Graugaard has experienced this contradiction first hand: “When I returned to Nuuk after spending a month in smaller villages, I was asked if I had seen ‘Greenland’ because, as was explained to me, ‘Nuuk is not Greenlandic’” (Dyrendom Graugaard 2009:29). I also experienced this myself during my own fieldwork and was told to go to Ilulisaat as “Nuuk is not Greenland” and most people living there “are Danish”. The Eskimologist Lill Rastad Bjørst sees the origin of this common understanding that Nuuk or other cities are not Greenlandic in the country’s cultural politics.

Bjørst argues that Greenland’s cultural policies reinforce static and stereotypical ideas of what is Greenlandic and are therefore more exclusive than inclusive. Thus, such policies complicate aligning “modern” *and* “Greenlandic” (Bjørst, 2008: 50-54). This is highly problematic as individuals in Greenland, especially the younger generations, are struggling to identify as Greenlanders. Instead, a conception of “loss of identity” becomes dominant. (Dyrendom Graugaard 2009:30)

It is in this discourse that exhibitions like “Inuit Now” and “Jette Bang i dialog” gain in importance. They both play with typical conceptions of what is Greenlandic and try to come up with new perspectives. In fact, both exhibitions show that Greenland is (post) modern while still being traditional – or rather, Greenland is (post) modern in its own way. Interpretations like these are needed in this (post) modernized world, as the post-colonialist scholar Moura-Koçoglu sees it:

James Clifford explains that a notion of culture which implies “an expectation of roots, of a stable, territorialized existence” has to be overhauled in the face of accelerated global

modernity. Once firmly 'rooted' in a pristine survival of traditions, cultures are now 'routed' through complex relational processes of "appropriation, compromise, subversion, masking, invention, and revival." Hence, instead of conjuring up 'pure' notions of culture, the process of forming and enunciating identity constitutes a transformative process of fragmentation, in which experiences and traditions of a specific past are remembered and reinterpreted as Joane Nagel points out: "By recasting the material of the past in innovative ways, in the service of new political agendas, ethnic movements re-forge their own culture and history and reinvent themselves." (Moura-Koçoglu 2011:7-8)

"Inuit Now" and "Jette Bang i dialog" show that Greenlanders do not need to fear the disappearance of their culture and traditions. Quite the opposite, if used strategically in the discussion about colonisation and independence, indigeneity can secure support for the country's ambitions. After all, it was the Danes who started patronizing Greenlanders under the assumption that they needed help. What a (post) modern and independent Greenland would show is that the country in fact does not need help and that colonisation did more harm than good. Greenland as a society gets more diverse with each generation. The wish for a homogenous and fixed culture is dated so instead of fearing for the disappearance of traditions, one could rather embrace change and make the best of it. "Inuit Now" and "Jette Bang i dialog" are examples that the combination of tradition and modern is in fact possible. These exhibitions are part of a bigger process though. Many young Greenlanders embrace their indigeneity by getting into contact with other Inuit from Canada and Alaska, a process that would not be possible without (post) modernization and new technology, and events such as the Arctic Winter Games provide a platform for young Greenlanders to learn more about their indigenous identity, together with their peers from other countries. I have heard about the wish to connect with Inuit overseas and to strengthen the connection with them many times during my fieldwork and there even is an on-going discussion in Greenland whether Danish or English should be the country's official second language (Pram Gad 2009:150). Many perceive Danish as the colonial and minority language and even as provincial, while English is perceived as more of a world language that could open up even greater opportunities for the country, for example to enter business agreements with the US or Canada (cf. Pram Gad 2009:150). Now that self-government is in place and Greenland has started the extraction of mineral resources, the country will gradually become financially less dependent on Denmark. Even though Greenland still receives block grants from Denmark, the earnings of resource extraction will diminish the amount of grants from Denmark over time (Dyrendom Graugaard 2009:48). An independence of Greenland will probably not become reality in the next decade, however steps

in that direction have been taken.

#### **4.5 Summary**

Greenland is on its way to (a greater if not full) independence and many politicians and artists try to change the way the country and its people are being represented in the media. Exhibitions like “Inuit Now” and “Jette Bang i dialog” try to create an image of Greenland that is like the country, diverse and in no way one-sided, and thereby contribute to a more open dialogue about the country. Stereotypes about Greenlanders still exist in Denmark and Greenland, and Denmark still rules over Greenland in many aspects. This is about to change and the first step in this direction is to educate Danes about Greenlanders as many people still know way too little about the country. “Inuit Now” and “Jette Bang i dialog” present the complexity of what Greenland is like today and surprise many when they realize that Greenland is not so different from Denmark and other countries after all. The future will tell whether or not a better knowledge of each other can actually improve the relation of the two countries, though exhibitions like the ones presented here at least serve as a step into the right direction - that is to increase awareness of what Greenland is like and help empower its people and society so that the country can take matters into its own hands and create a better and secure future.



## 5. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to present an overview of the depiction of Greenlandic culture in museums and art institutions of Denmark and Greenland. During my fieldwork in the summer of 2015, I visited seven different institutions in Copenhagen and Nuuk and found three overall themes: the depiction of Greenlanders as traditional hunters as found in the National Museum of Denmark, Greenland National Museum & Archives, and the Art Museum of Nuuk; the depiction of Greenlanders as threatened indigenous people in the context of climate change as found in the exhibitions “Greenland Spirit” and “Red Snow”; and finally the depiction of Greenlanders as modern people in a self-governed state as found in the two exhibitions “Inuit Now” and “Jette Bang i dialog”.

My main research questions for this thesis were how Greenlandic culture is represented in Denmark and Greenland and whether exhibitions contain any outdated views or common stereotypes. My overall impression of the representation of Greenlandic culture in Denmark and Greenland (as of 2015) is that Greenlanders are generally depicted in a certain political context. In the two National Museums and the Art Museum of Nuuk, Greenlanders are depicted as if they still live in a colony. The image of Greenland that you can find in these institutions centres around historical views of Greenlanders as exotic or so called “Noble Savages”. At the Art Museum of Nuuk, I looked at 19<sup>th</sup> century paintings of Greenlanders hunting polar bears while I was provided with lots of information about hunting in general at Greenland National Museum & Archives and could admire lots of hunting weapons that were traditionally used by Greenlanders, at the National Museum of Denmark.

Another politically influenced theme I found during my fieldwork was the depiction of Greenlanders as threatened indigenous people due to climate change. The exhibition “Greenland Spirit” told me that it only takes one generation for the Greenlandic culture and traditions to vanish, while “Red Snow” showed me polar bears walking on green grass. Lastly, the exhibitions “Inuit Now” and “Jette Bang i dialog” showed a Greenland that is influenced by its quest for independence but that despite its (post) modern influences, has not lost any of its traditions.

These three themes are clearly connected to socio-political processes in Denmark and Greenland. Denmark still seems to have trouble to recognize its past as a colonial power over Greenland, but does not want to let the country be independent either. The fact that the National Museum of Denmark does not thematise the country’s past (and present) influence on Greenland is related to current political processes in Denmark in regards to Greenland.

Greenland National Museum & Archives then again thematises colonisation quite a bit, however since the great majority of artefacts that are presented there, have been repatriated from the National Museum of Denmark, it is no surprise that the two museums are very similar when it comes to how they present Greenland. Finally, the Art Museum of Nuuk and their focus on historical depictions of Greenlanders is partly a result of economic processes in Nuuk as it was Svend Junge who donated his private collection to the city on the condition that it is to be presented in the museum in exactly the way he wanted it to. Also the art exhibitions I presented originate in socio-political processes. “Greenland Spirit” is a direct result of the COP 15 climate conference in Copenhagen and while presenting a combination of the modern and the traditional, still focuses on the consequences global warming would have on Greenlandic traditions and culture. “Red Snow”, which has the bi-name “when the climate is bleeding”, is also centred in the discourse on climate change and its effect on indigenous people in the Arctic. The artist Julia Pars even collected and displayed opinions of Greenlanders on climate change during this exhibition to make the message even clearer: climate change will destroy the living environment of Greenlanders. Opinions on climate change vary however and as the eskimologist Lill Rastad Bjørst explained, climate change is not perceived as a threat by all Greenlanders and even opens up new economic possibilities for the country. Six years after the introduction of self-government, new economic opportunities are as important as ever. Greenlanders have been recognized as a people and Greenlanders are now able to decide about their future on their own. Greenland is a (post) modern country that has not lost its roots, which is what the two exhibitions “Inuit Now” and “Jette Bang i dialog” present.

This thesis has shown that the current discourse on Greenlandic culture in museums and art exhibitions is a result of political processes and furthermore that a lot of this discourse is still characterized by primitivism and Arcticism. Five of the seven exhibitions presented make use of outdated views or common stereotypes of Greenlanders as indigenous people, while only “Inuit Now” and “Jette Bang i dialog” present a more complex view on what Greenland is like today. These two exhibitions show that Greenland is in fact (post) modern but has not lost any of its roots while “Red Snow” and “Greenland Spirit” focus on the possibility of climate change destroying the traditional lifestyle of Greenlanders, and the exhibitions at the three museums do not even make the step into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and instead solely focus on the time of colonisation and what they regard as authentic traditional culture.

All (post) modern cultures are characterized by constant change and even though Greenlandic culture has changed during colonisation, the three museums rather depict the way the country has been way back in the past. Greenlandic culture then might change again in the

future due to climate change as “Red Snow” and “Greenland Spirit” told us. Greenlandic culture in fact has already changed and the country is as (post) modern as any other one in Europe while still appreciating its traditions, as “Jette Bang i dialog” and “Inuit Now” showed.

The themes found in the different exhibitions however are not influenced by socio-political processes alone, neither are they as simple as this analysis might made them sound like. As Ruth B. Phillips showed, museums often have a difficult time to create exhibitions that fit everyone’s demands – especially so when it comes to the depiction of indigenous people. Museums and artists are often confronted with contrasting expectations and the involvement of indigenous representatives not automatically makes an exhibition more nuanced and free of stereotypes as an exhibition where that is not the case. Greenland National Museum & Archives is an example of this. Even though the institution is the National Museum of the country, its depictions of Inuit are not more or less nuanced than what you can see at the National Museum of Denmark. Also “Greenland Spirit” and “Red Snow” were projects where Inuit artists have been involved but still they tell of the threatened, and therefore weak, Greenlander affected by an almost almighty climate change. Then again, as Paul Chaat Smith mentioned, to consult an indigenous artist for a project, does not guarantee your exhibition to be flawless in the end. After all, we all have different opinions on things and just because someone is indigenous, does not mean that he or she does not have stereotypes of his own culture, neither does it mean that his opinion is the universal truth. However museums and art exhibitions can, and in my opinion should, work as mediators between different cultures, different opinions and different expectations. These “contact zones” as James Clifford calls them, are important in the process of the forming of public opinions and it is therefore that the results of this thesis are important.

Despite having been the centre of attention in international media quite often in the last couple of years, Greenland is still relatively unknown to people all around the world and even in Denmark. I personally experienced that many people still only associate the coldness of the Arctic with Greenland and are not aware of how (post) modern the country actually is. Museums in particular, as places of education and information, should aim to present a neutral and nuanced image of the objects they portray, and Greenland as a country is more than just cold and remote. The fact that Arcticism even is used when raising awareness for climate change, is all the more reason for concern. Greenlanders have the chance to decide about their country on their own now and possibly become independent in the future. Therefore it is important that as many people as possible get the chance to learn how varied and complex Greenland really is.

This thesis however is limited to the short time frame of the summer of 2015 and only seven institutions. It would be interesting to see what future exhibitions say about Greenland and whether or not the museums mentioned here will change their exhibits. I also only got to talk to a very limited number of visitors, so it would be interesting to conduct a greater research in more institutions and with more interviews and talks to guests.

What my fieldwork has shown me however, is that while there are still museums which present Greenlandic culture in an either patronizing or outdated way, more and more artists are becoming interested in Greenland as a topic for an exhibition and try to present their view on the country - whether they think that Greenlandic culture is threatened due to climate change or whether they just want to present a different picture, namely that of a (post) modern culture and society in a time of change. To conclude, Greenland is talked about a lot right now and no matter where the country is headed in the future, it is positive to see that so many institutions at least provide a platform for discussing the future of the country but first and foremost, to learn more about Greenlanders themselves.

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