

JULY 8, 2022

NATURAL ATTRACTION
10 NUNAVUT LANDSCAPES

Tomorrow—July 9—is Nunavut Day, which commemorates Parliament's approval of the Nunavut Act, making the region a Canadian territory. To celebrate, we're highlighting Inuit creators and artists from the South whose work is profoundly inspired by the majestic beauty of this northern landscape.

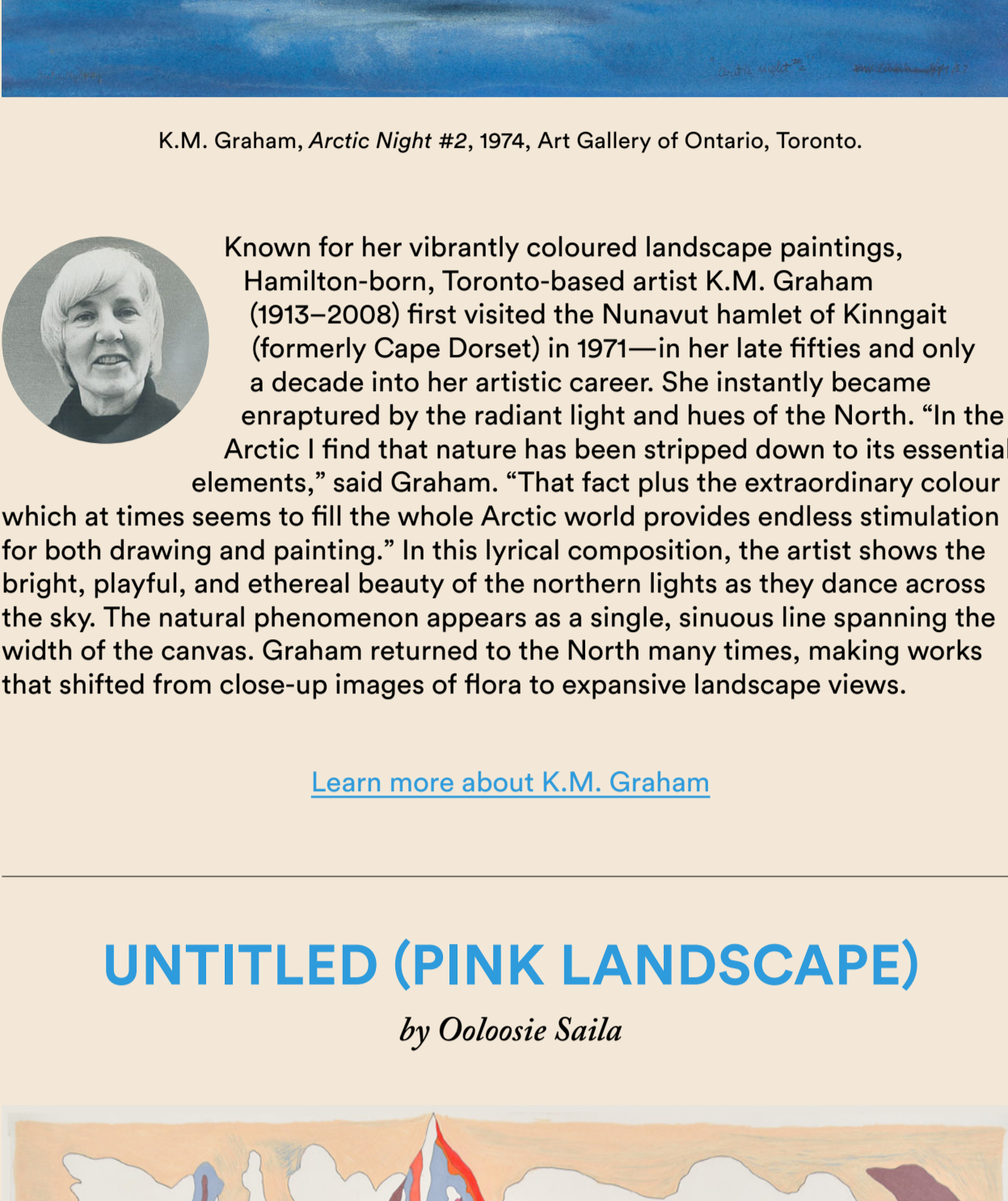
Oolooisie Saila, *Untitled (Pink Landscape)*, 2019, Collection of Stephanie Comer and Rob Craigie.

Canada's largest territory is Nunavut. From its soaring icebergs and mountains to the enchanting northern lights and summertime midnight sun, the land's otherworldly beauty has long fuelled creativity. In honour of Nunavut Day tomorrow, we're showcasing works by artists from both the North and South that demonstrate their profound admiration for, and careful observation of, the vast Arctic territory, which forms part of the homeland of the Inuit in Canada. Our list includes Kenojuak Ashevak and Jessie Oonark, two modern Inuit artists whose work from the 1950s onward transformed Nunavut into an epicentre of artistic production. We're also looking at such contemporary makers as Oolooisie Saila, who continues to draw inspiration from the land and depict it in surprising ways. Finally, we have turned our attention to painters from the South, including Doris McCarthy and A.Y. Jackson, who, fascinated by the natural marvels of the Arctic, have ventured thousands of miles to experience and depict the dramatic and unique physical features of the northern territory. We hope you enjoy the selections below, which demonstrate how the land of Nunavut forms a fundamental foundation of Inuit art and culture while holding a central place in our collective imagination and national identity.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

NUNAVUT - OUR LAND

by Kenojuak Ashevak

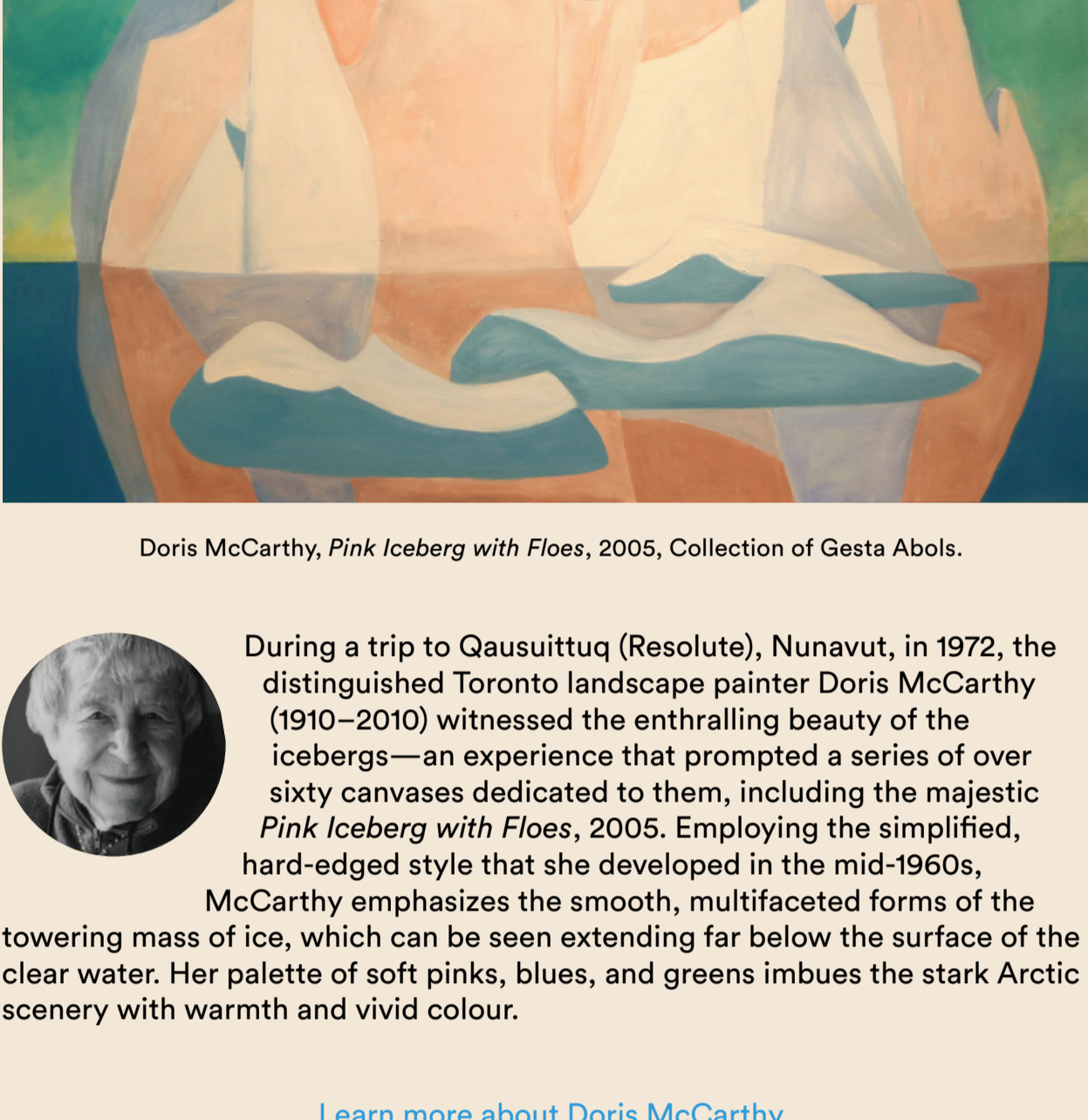
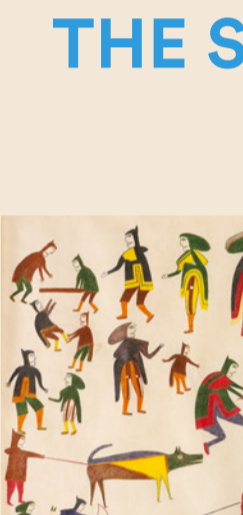
Kenojuak Ashevak, *Nunavut - Our Land*, 1992, Collection of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

Kenojuak Ashevak (1927–2013), a revered leader in modern Inuit art, created this spectacular depiction of the four seasons in Nunavut to commemorate the signing ceremony for the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut Settlement Agreement in 1993, which formally established a homeland in Canada for Inuit of the Eastern Arctic. The lower section of the image shows the warmer harvesting months, when the Inuit traditionally lived in camping tents. Figures roam the verdant land in search of wild plants and berries, while hunters steer kayaks in waters teeming with fish, birds, and whales. During the colder seasons, igloos, speeding sled dogs, polar bears, caribou, and other wildlife—including one owl, the artist's favourite subject—enliven the winter landscape. The hilly landscape encircling the composition references Ashevak's community of Kinngait (formerly Cape Dorset), whose name means "mountains."

[Learn more about Kenojuak Ashevak](#)

ARCTIC NIGHT #2

by K.M. Graham

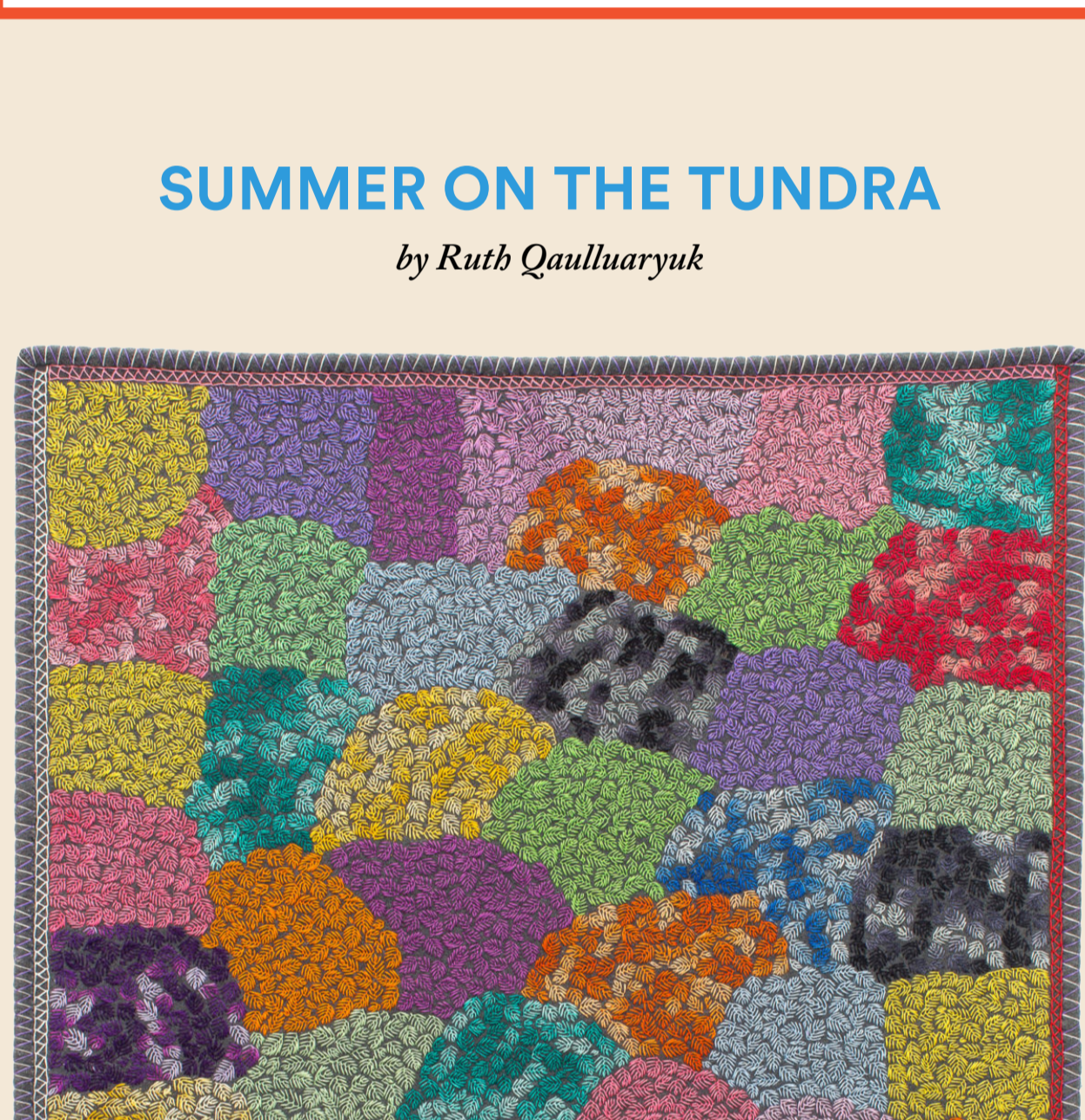
K.M. Graham, *Arctic Night #2*, 1974, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Known for her vibrantly coloured landscape paintings, Hamilton-born, Toronto-based artist K.M. Graham (1913–2008) first visited the Nunavut hamlet of Kinngait (formerly Cape Dorset) in 1971—in her late fifties and only a decade into her artistic career. She instantly became captivated by the radiant light and hues of the North. "In the Arctic I find that nature has been stripped down to its essential elements," said Graham. "That fact plus the extraordinary colour which at times seems to fill the whole Arctic world provides endless stimulation for both drawing and painting." In this lyrical composition, the artist shows the bright, playful, and ethereal beauty of the northern lights as they dance across the sky. The natural phenomenon appears as a single, sinuous line spanning the width of the canvas. Graham returned to the North many times, making works that shifted from close-up images of flora to expansive landscape views.

[Learn more about K.M. Graham](#)

UNTITLED (PINK LANDSCAPE)

by Oolooisie Saila

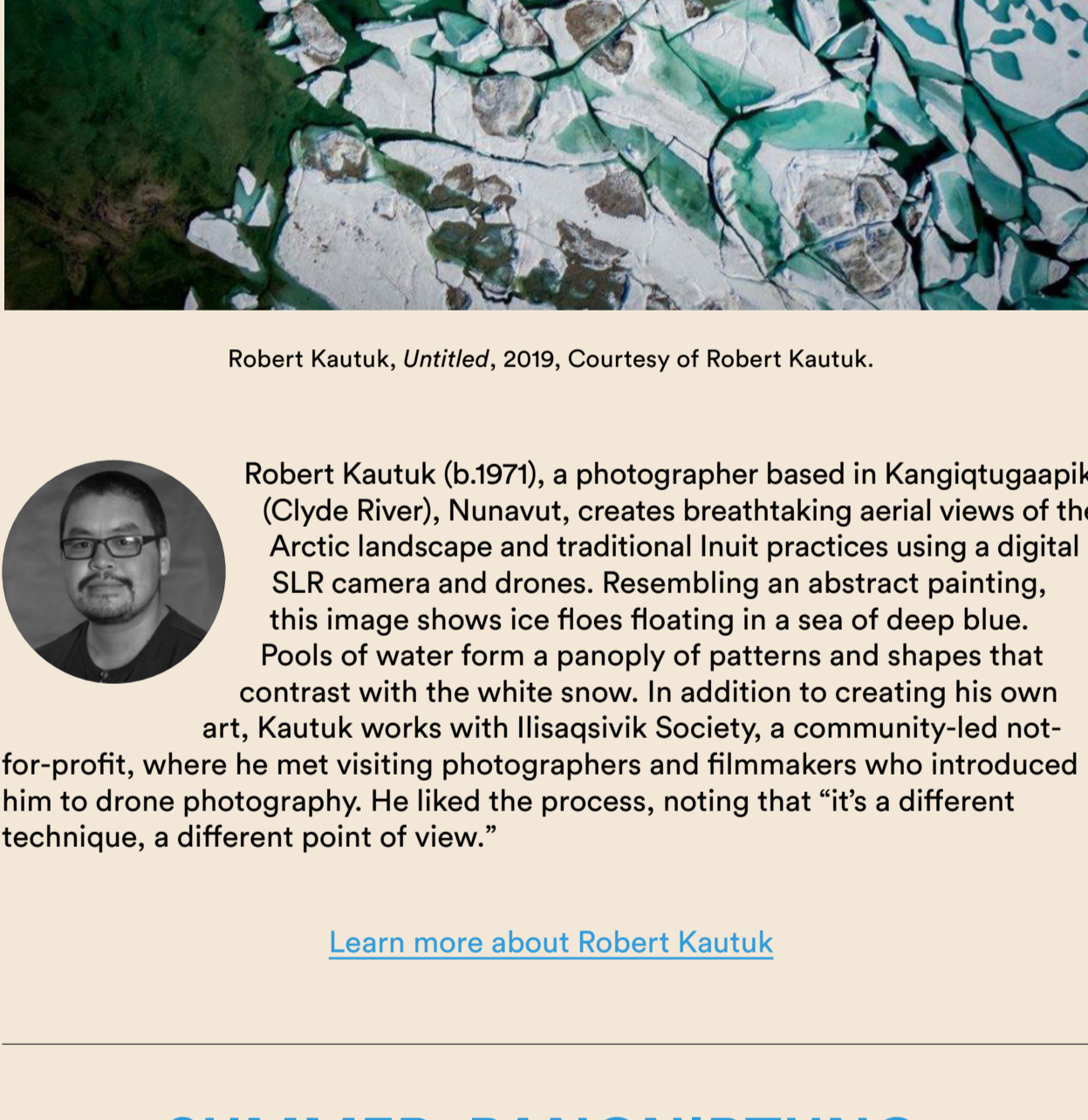
Oolooisie Saila, *Untitled (Pink Landscape)*, 2019, Collection of Stephanie Comer and Rob Craigie.

In this magnificent drawing of the Arctic landscape in constant motion, Oolooisie Saila (b.1991) juxtaposes fiery skies with icy waters. Jagged clouds are interwoven with meandering streaks of saturated colour, reflecting the artist's keen fascination with the complex shapes and patterns found in nature. Known for her dynamic large-scale compositions and vibrant palette, Saila was inspired after meeting the legendary Inuit artist Kenojuak Ashevak, who was her friend's grandmother. Through her innovative exploration of line and colour, Saila creates highly imaginative images of northern landscapes and wildlife which at times verge on abstraction.

[Learn more about Oolooisie Saila](#)

PINK ICEBERG WITH FLOES

by Doris McCarthy

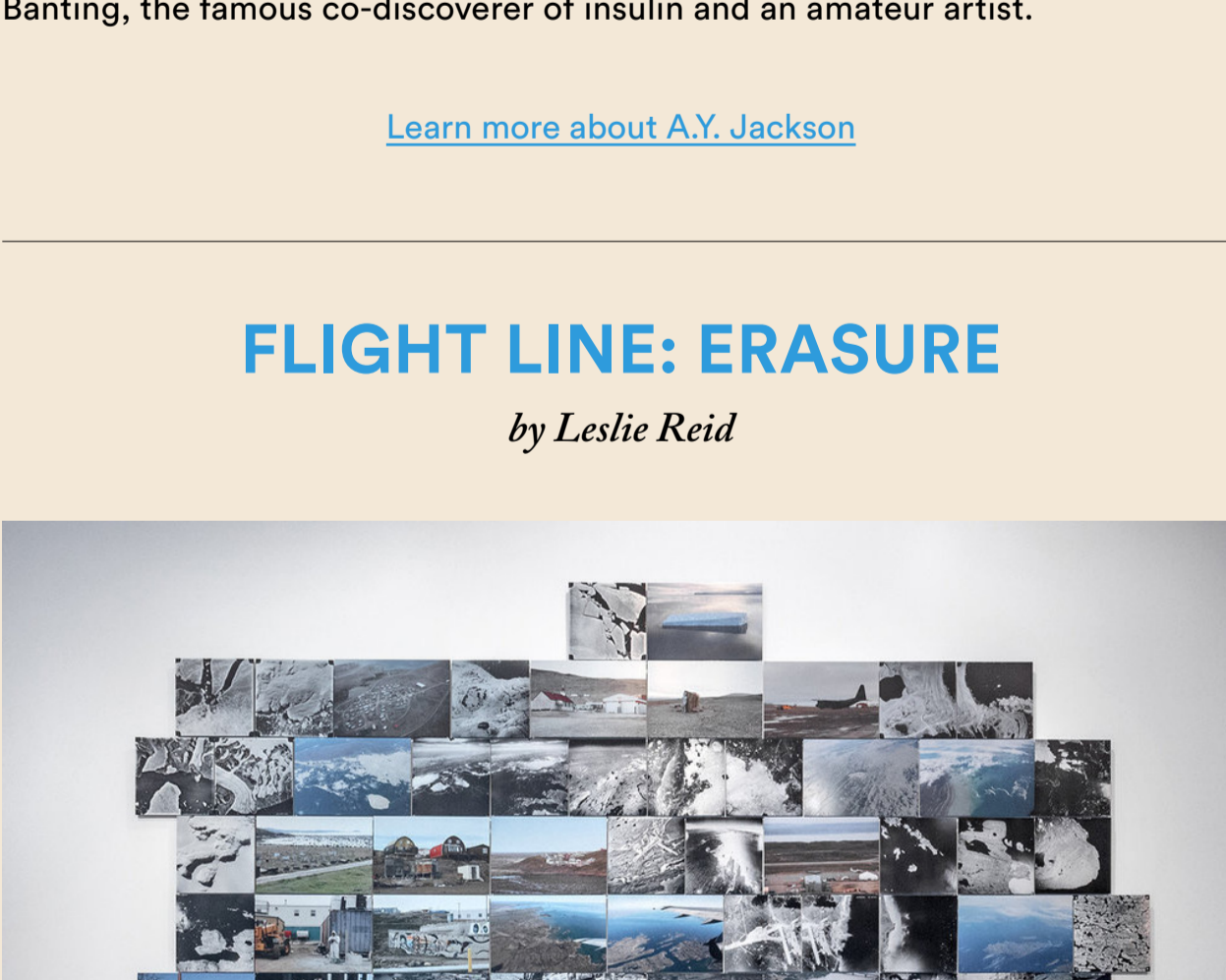
Doris McCarthy, *Pink Iceberg with Floes*, 2005, Collection of Gesta Abols.

During a trip to Qausuittuaq (Resolute), Nunavut, in 1972, the distinguished Toronto-based artist Doris McCarthy (1910–2010) witnessed the enthralling beauty of the icebergs—an experience that prompted a series of over sixty canvases dedicated to them, including the majestic *Pink Iceberg with Floes*, 2005. Employing the simplified, hard-edged style that she developed in the mid-1960s, McCarthy emphasizes the smooth, multifaceted forms of the towering mass of ice, which can be seen extending far below the surface of the clear water. Her palette of soft pinks, blues, and greens imbues the stark Arctic scenery with warmth and vivid colour.

[Learn more about Doris McCarthy](#)

WHEN THE DAYS ARE LONG AND THE SUN SHINES INTO THE NIGHT

by Jessie Oonark

Jessie Oonark, *When the Days are Long and the Sun Shines into the Night*, 1966–69, felt pen and graphite on wove paper, 126.8 x 317.8 cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Gift of Boris and Elizabeth Kozlovskaya, Baker Lake, Northwest Territories, 1991 (S2105). © Public Trustee for Nunavut, Estate of Jessie Oonark. Photo: NGC.

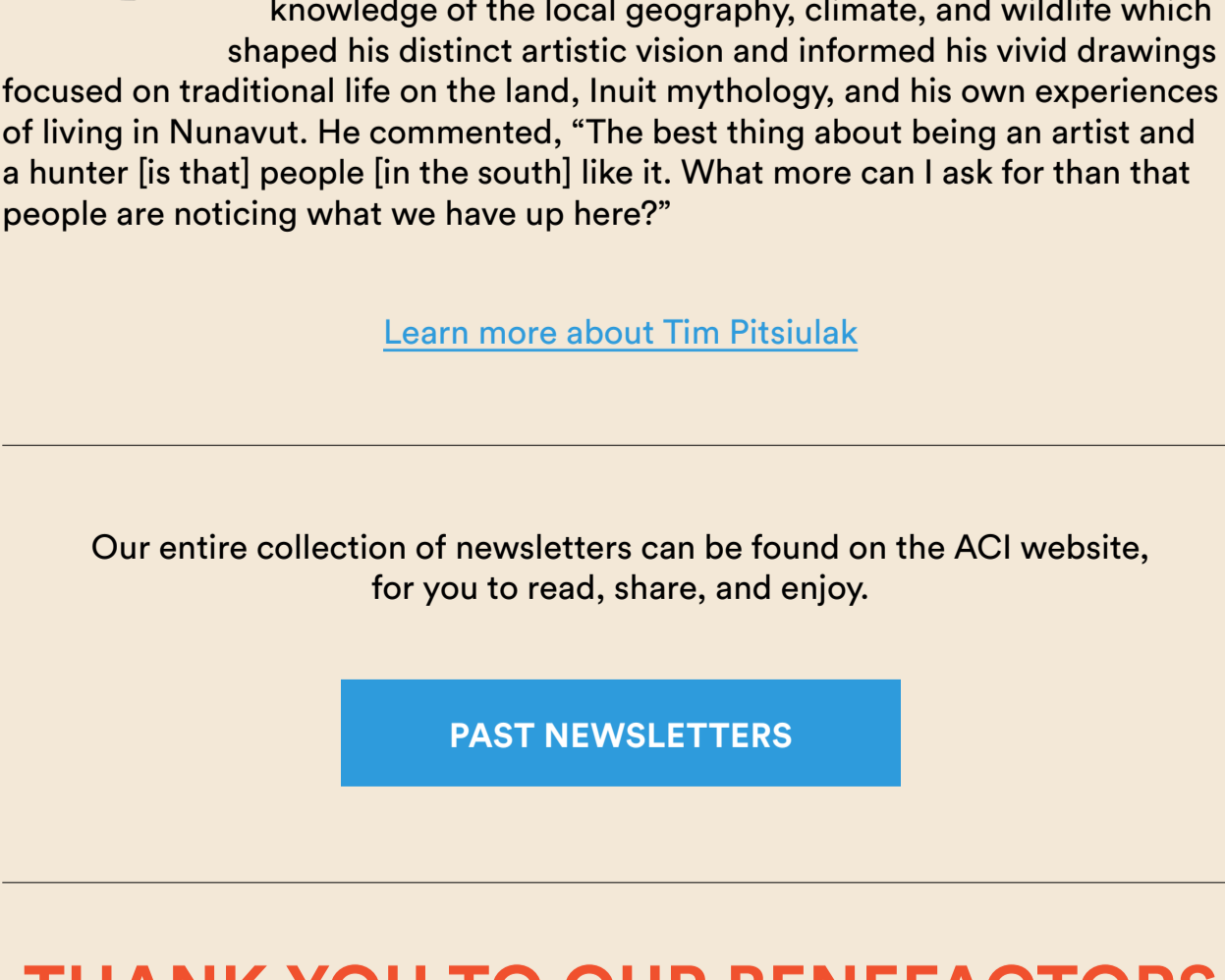
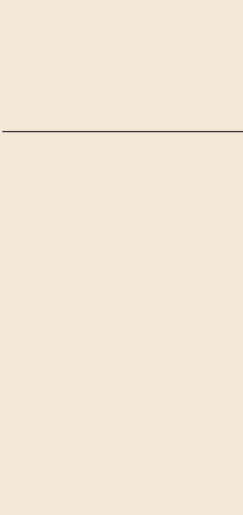
The revered Inuk artist Jessie Oonark (1906–1985), who hailed from the Back River area of Nunavut and settled in Qamanittuaq (Baker Lake) in 1958, created this panoramic drawing to capture the liveliest time of the year in the territory, when there are nearly twenty-four hours of daylight during the summer months. People are engaged in a remarkable array of activities, including hunting caribou using bows and arrows, playing ball, shovelling snow, making kinnook, repairing a sled, and, in the centre, performing a drum dance. Around the circle of figures is a ring of suns to signal the long-lasting sunlight. Many individuals wear parka designs that are specific to their region, indicating that life throughout the land of Nunavut is represented in Oonark's ambitious drawing.

[Learn more about Jessie Oonark](#)

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SUMMER ON THE TUNDRA

by Ruth Qualluaryuk

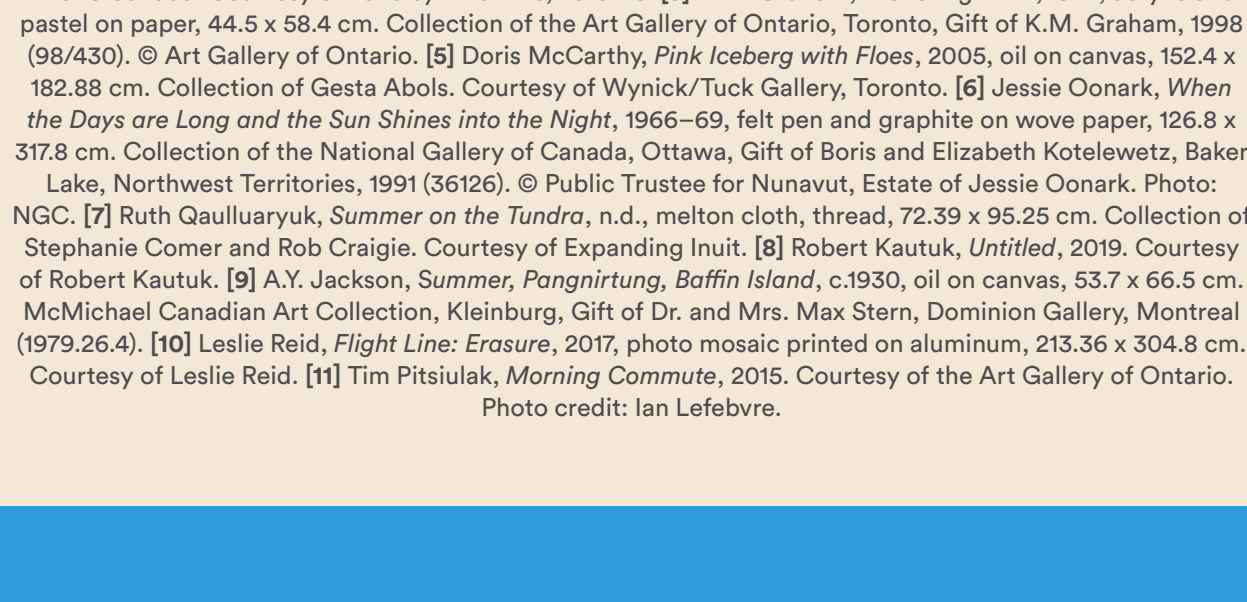
Ruth Qualluaryuk, *Summer on the Tundra*, n.d., Collection of Stephanie Comer and Rob Craigie.

Bursting with life, Nunavut-born Ruth Qualluaryuk's (b.1932) textile work evokes the colourful vista of her childhood summers in Qamanittuaq (Baker Lake). Surprisingly and incongruously, the artist uses melton cloth—a type of thick wool—to depict the warmest season of the year. Qualluaryuk's textile art and wall hangings often reference the Arctic landscape and animals of her home. As she explains, "When I was a child growing up, I used to really like it when the flowers would grow on the tundra. [They] are beautiful, in my memory." With careful and intricate consideration in every stitch, Qualluaryuk's love of nature's beauty in the summertime is visibly woven into this tactile piece.

[Learn more about Ruth Qualluaryuk](#)

UNTITLED

by Robert Kautuk

Robert Kautuk, *Untitled*, 2019, Courtesy of Robert Kautuk.

Robert Kautuk (b.1971), a photographer based in Kangitugaapik (Clyde River), Nunavut, creates breathtaking aerial views of the Arctic landscape and traditional Inuit practices using a digital SLR camera and drones. Resembling an abstract painting, this image shows ice floes floating in a sea of deep blue. Pools of water form a panoply of patterns and shapes that contrast with the white snow. In addition to creating his own art, Kautuk works with Ilisagvik School, a community-led not-for-profit, where he met visiting photographers and filmmakers who introduced him to drone photography. He liked the process, noting that "it's a different technique, a different point of view."

[Learn more about Robert Kautuk](#)

SUMMER, PANGNIRTUNG, BAFFIN ISLAND

by A.Y. Jackson

A.Y. Jackson, *Summer, Pangnirtung, Baffin Island*, c.1930, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.

A young Inuit family, their camping tent, and their dogs blend in with the resplendent landscape of Pangnirtung in summertime in this painting by A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974). In 1930, Jackson and fellow Group of Seven member Lawren S. Harris (1885–1970) embarked on a two-month, 9,000-mile journey to remote communities in the Arctic aboard the S.S. *Beothic*, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police supply ship and ice breaker. While there, Jackson was inspired to create this composition of a father who attends to his child, as its mother gazes at the placid blue and purple-tinted water and the large, undulating hills on the opposite side of the shore. It was the artist's second visit to the Arctic aboard the S.S. *Beothic*—his first took place in 1927 and he was joined by Dr. Frederick Banting, the famous co-discoverer of insulin and an amateur artist.

[Learn more about A.Y. Jackson](#)

FLIGHT LINE: ERASURE

by Leslie Reid

Leslie Reid, *Flight Line: Erasure*, 2017, Courtesy of Leslie Reid.

In *Flight Line: Erasure*, 2017, the Ottawa-based artist Leslie Reid (b.1947) brings together historical images and her own contemporary photographs documenting places along plane routes from Ottawa's Rockliffe Air Station to the North. The former Canadian Forces Base was built as part of government programs to assert sovereignty in the Arctic at the beginning of the Cold War. One of the routes in Reid's work represents the High Arctic Relocation of 1953, when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police moved ninety-two Inuit from Inukjuag, Quebec, and Minitmatilik (Pond Inlet), Nunavut, to inhospitable locations in the High Arctic. By revisiting these past journeys in the present day, Reid challenges the erasure of dark histories embedded in the Northern landscape and examines the ongoing effects of colonialism.

[Learn more about Leslie Reid](#)

MORNING COMMUTE

by Tim Pitsiulak

Tim Pitsiulak, *Morning Commute*, 2015, Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Playfully titled *Morning Commute*, this coloured-pencil drawing by the Kimmirut-born artist Tim Pitsiulak (1967–2016) depicts two figures standing at the edge of the water as the sun emerges on the horizon, turning the sky a vivid red. The pair and their snowmobiles remain in shadow in the early dawn. As a gifted hunter, Pitsiulak possessed an intimate knowledge of the local geography, climate, and wildlife which shaped his distinct artistic vision and informed his vivid drawings focused on traditional life on the land, Inuit mythology, and his own experiences of living in Nunavut. He commented, "The best thing about being an artist and a hunter [is that] people [in the south] like it. What more can I ask for than that people are noticing what we have up here?"

[Learn more about Tim Pitsiulak](#)

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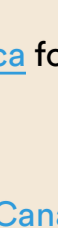
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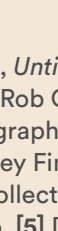
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