

**EXHIBITION EXAMINING THE HISTORY, IDENTITY, AND VISUAL CULTURE
OF THE ARCTIC SÁMI PEOPLE THROUGH TRADITIONAL HANDICRAFT AND
CONTEMPORARY ARTWORK OPENS MAY 10 AT SCANDINAVIA HOUSE**

*Contemporary photographs, sculptures, and prints as well as a rare 17th-century shaman's drum
on view in exhibition spanning the 17th century to the present*

Exhibition Opening: Saturday, May 10, 6–8 pm

Sámi Stories: Art and Identity of an Arctic People, a landmark exhibition examining the history, identity, and visual culture of the indigenous Sámi people, opens at **Scandinavia House: The Nordic Center in America, in New York City, on May 10, 2014**. Featuring a selection of contemporary artworks and traditional *duodji* (handicraft)—including a reindeer milk scoop, shaman's drum, cradle, and a selection of hats and dolls—the exhibition offers visitors an overview of Sámi history and visual culture from the 17th century to the present.

The exhibition is organized by Northern Norway Art Museum, Tromsø University Museum, and The American-Scandinavian Foundation (ASF) in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Norwegian Sámi Parliament and 200th anniversary of the Constitution of Norway, and draws from major Norwegian collections to highlight the historical and contemporary cultural vitality of the Sámi.

Historical Background

The Sámi are the indigenous people of Sápmi, a territory comprising Northern Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Russia's Kola Peninsula. Since the establishment of national borders in Fenno-Scandinavia, the Sámi have struggled for formal, legal recognition of their status and rights as an indigenous people, but were largely ignored until the late 20th century. In 1998, the Norwegian government passed constitutional Article 110a, which, for the first time, formally recognized the Sámi as a separate people



Fig. 1. Marja Helander, *Ánnevárri (Mount Annivaara)*, 2002. From the series *Modern Nomads*. Photograph on aluminum, 19 x 15 3/5 in. (48 x 39.5 cm). The Sámi Collections, Karasjok.

under Norwegian law, and established the Sámi Parliament of Norway, a representative body for people of Sámi heritage. Historically, Sámi art has been the most important means of expression for the Sámi—a way to communicate Sámi identity, ideas, and values to the world outside Sápmi—and Sámi artists have been deeply involved in Sámi cultural and political movements.



Fig. 2. Goavddis/Veahcir (Shaman's Drum/Hammer)
Pine covered with skin, copper rings/Horn, steel nails,
leather. Rana, Nordland, c. 1600–1700.
Tromsø University Museum.



Fig. 3. Arnold Johansen, *Vuolga – Čáhppat (Departure – Black)*, 2000. Woodcut on paper, 48 x 45 1/3 in. (122 x 115 cm). Northern Norway Art Museum, Tromsø (NNKM.00468).

her fiber and textile works. Printmaker **John Savio**'s works depict the prominence of reindeer in Sámi communities and activities. And Finnish Sámi photographer **Marja Helander** explores the contrasts characteristic of modern Sámi life in a playful series of photographs entitled *Modern Nomads*.

Sámi history and politics are addressed in the works of Swedish Sámi textile artist and painter **Britta**

Overview

Sámi Stories: Art and Identity of an Arctic People offers an overview of Sámi history, politics, religion, and identity through the pairing of historical, cultural objects and contemporary artworks. Together, the works on view highlight the issues, traditions, ideas, and narratives that have shaped, and continue to shape, the Sámi people and culture.

Several objects, like a shaman's drum and hammer (Fig. 2) from c. 1600–1700, address Sámi religious practice, an ancient form of shamanism centered on painted skin drums. Sámi shamanism was forced underground in the 17th and 18th centuries, but many people continued to make offerings at the same sacred places, a number of which have been captured by contemporary Norwegian photographer **Arvid Sveen** in works from his 2003 series *Mythical Landscape*. In her collage *Grandmother's 448 Treasures (Áhkku 448 vuorkkát)*, Swedish Sámi poet and artist **Rose-Marie Huuva** addresses her Sámi-Laestadian religious background.

Sámi identity has long been bound up with reindeer, historically a crucial resource of the Sámi, the foundation of their livelihood and cultural identity, and an icon of "Sáminess" outside of Sápmi. This fact is evident in many of the older objects on view—a 19th-century reindeer harness, a horn knife, a birch reindeer milk scoop—as well as in the contemporary: Textile artist **Aslaug Juliussen** has been actively involved with reindeer herding for the past 20 years and incorporates reindeer remains into

Marakatt-Labba, who illustrates major Sámi events, among them the 1852 Kautokeino Rebellion and 1970s Alta Case, in her extensive, scrolling embroideries. Similarly, Norwegian Sámi printmaker **Arnold Johansen** focuses on the history and landscape of the Sámi territory of Finnmark in large scale, abstract woodcuts on paper (Fig. 3).

The exhibition also includes a number of prime examples of Sámi *duodji*, or traditional handicraft and artwork, including dolls, caps, and cradles, as well as **Iver Jåks'** contemporary sculptures, which reference traditional Sámi handicraft techniques (Fig. 4).

Organization

Sámi Stories: Art and Identity of an Arctic People has been curated by Charis Gullickson, Curator of Contemporary Art at Northern Norway Art Museum, and Marit Anne Hauan, Director of the Tromsø University Museum. The exhibition has been organized by Northern Norway Art Museum, Tromsø University Museum, and The American-Scandinavian Foundation (ASF).

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated, two-volume boxed set catalogue with eleven essays discussing a variety of topics including Sámi cultural expression, art, language, politics, and history, among others, written by Ole Henrik Magga, first President of the Sámi Parliament; Dr. Anne Julie Semb, Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Oslo; Terje Brantenberg, Social Anthropologist and Assistant Professor, Tromsø University Museum; Lill Tove Frederiksen, Research Fellow, UiT The Arctic University of Norway; Ola Graff, Professor, Tromsø University Museum; Nils Oskal, Sámi University College; Kjellaug Isaksen, Curator and Artist, Centre for Northern Peoples; Dikka Storm, Curator, Tromsø University Museum; Dr. Hanna Horsberg Hansen, Associate Professor, Tromsø Academy of Contemporary Art and Creative Writing, UiT The Arctic University of Norway; Monica Grini, Art Historian, UiT The Arctic University of Norway; Dr. Anniken Greve, Philosopher and Professor of Comparative Literature, UiT The Arctic University of Norway; and Charis Gullickson, Curator, Northern Norway Art Museum.



Fig. 4. Iver Jåks, *Balvosakkitt I (Offertory Pillars I)*, 1980. Pine, juniper, bone, and leather, 56 x 14 3/5 x 14 1/5 in. (142.5 x 37 x 36 cm). Northern Norway Art Museum, Tromsø (NNKM.01310).

The American-Scandinavian Foundation

The American-Scandinavian Foundation (ASF) is the leading cultural and educational link between the United States and the Nordic countries. An American nonprofit organization, the ASF works to

build international understanding through an extensive program of fellowships, grants, intern/trainee sponsorship, publishing, and membership offerings. Headquartered at Scandinavia House, in New York City, the ASF celebrated its centennial in 2011.

For more information: www.amscan.org

Scandinavia House: The Nordic Center in America

As the headquarters of The American-Scandinavian Foundation, Scandinavia House presents contemporary Nordic culture through a wide range of programs that encompass the visual arts, music, and literature, as well as business, finance, and technology. Offerings include art, design, and historical exhibitions; films; concerts; lectures and literary programs; symposia; language courses; and programs for children and families.

For more information: www.scandinaviahouse.org | Facebook | Twitter @ScanHouse | #samistories

Northern Norway Art Museum

Northern Norway Art Museum was established in 1985 and focuses on art connected to the region of Northern Norway, in addition to main trends in Norwegian visual and applied art from the early 19th century to the present. Highlights include works by Peder Balke, Adelsteen Normann, Iver Jåks, Anna-Eva Bergman, Olav Christopher Jenssen, and David Hockney, as well as works by major Norwegian artists including Edvard Munch, Harriet Backer, and Christian Krohg. The Museum also features temporary exhibitions of historic and contemporary art.

For more information: www.nnkm.no

Tromsø University Museum

Established in 1872, Tromsø University Museum is Northern Norway's oldest scientific institution, and its collections document over 100 years of exploration in the region. The museum has been a part of the University of Tromsø, the northernmost university in the world, since 1976.

For more information: <http://uit.no/tmu>

Hours and Admission

Admission is free to the Scandinavia House 3rd Floor Gallery; open Tuesday through Saturday from 12–6 pm, Wednesday until 7 pm.

Media Contacts

Kate Erickson, Press & Communications, Scandinavia House/The American-Scandinavian Foundation:
+1 212.847.9717 or kate@amscan.org

Ariana Tiziani, Cultural & Educational Programs, Scandinavia House/The American-Scandinavian Foundation:
+1 212.847.9734 or ariana@amscan.org