



Understanding the Greenlandic Performing Arts

By Sirí Paulsen



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Table of Contents

04 Summary & About the Author

04 Note from the author

05 Archiving and transmission in relation to Inuit performance history

06 A melting pot of traditions – seen from a Greenlandic performance-historical perspective

07 Silamiut becomes the National Theatre

07 The development of the National Theatre

08 Late 20th and early 21st century performance artists and their influence

08 The conditions for dance in Greenland

09 News from the independent field

10 Conclusion: New theatre, old performance

10 References

UNDERSTANDING THE GREENLANDIC PERFORMING ARTS

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Summary

The Performing Arts as a Carrier of Culture

In this essay, Greenlandic-Danish director, researcher, producer and sound designer Sirí Paulsen offers a valuable insight into the Greenlandic performing arts from a performance-historical perspective. With a particular focus on Inuit narratives, archival traditions and the transmission of knowledge, she asks - which story is being told, who is telling it, and to which audience?

Paulsen's essay provides a historical overview that highlights the revitalisation of drum and mask dance traditions in the 1970s, as well as the development of the Greenlandic National Theatre in order to shed light on contemporary Greenlandic performing arts; a flourishing community of Inuit artists increasingly reclaiming ownership of their cultural heritage.

The outside world is showing a growing interest in Greenlandic performing arts. Could it be that a wider audience is finally ripe and ready to embrace contemporary Greenlandic performing arts from the inside out - told by Inuit themselves?



About the author

Sirí Paulsen (GL/DK) is a Greenlandic Inuk and Danish freelance researcher, teacher, director, sound designer and producer. Sirí holds a BA from the University of Wyoming and an MA in Theatre & Performance Studies from Copenhagen University, and is currently connected to the cultural centre Nordatlantens Brygge in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Understanding the Greenlandic Performing Arts

Note from the author

There is no single text - including this one - which fully defines the scope of the Greenlandic performing arts. Indeed, it is not a scene that is typically supported in abundance with academic or journalistic literature. To learn about it in depth, one must be proficient in both Kalaallisut (Greenlandic), Danish and English. My learning journey is ongoing and this essay is another stop along the way.

In this essay, I aim to explain how Inuit traditions have been seen as either dangerous or exotic, two highly stigmatising views which have obstructed the practice of these traditions right up until the opening of the Greenlandic National Theatre's acting school in 2011. I will also explore how the reclaiming of tradition and the emergence of new forms of Greenlandic performance and storytelling impact the narratives surrounding Inuit culture.

Inuit artistic expression is as diverse as any other and is often pursued for the sake of art itself. However, performing arts seems to also play a crucial role in the decolonisation movement. The arts offer a safe space to experiment, which allows Inuit artists to address existential questions, such as 'who am I, if I do not have access to the traditions of my people?'

Archiving and transmission in relation to Inuit performance history

If you were to visit the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen, you would see an Inuit drum exhibited behind glass for the exhibition 'Voices from the colonies'. On the glass, you would find a text which describes a ritual of juridical character: how Inuit would use the drum along with verbal insults to clear the rights and wrongs in a conflict between two parties.

I recall first hearing this description while sitting in a classroom in Nuuk. It was delivered by a Danish history teacher, not long after I had watched the 2002 blockbuster movie *8 Mile*, featuring Eminem. I could not help but think that this musical way of conflict resolution was very similar to what I had just learned about rap battles in Detroit - my excuse being that I was thirteen years old at the time.

Later, as I search the exhibition in vain for a more comprehensive and responsible explanation as to why the Danish authorities in Greenland made the drum (and mask) dance of Greenlandic Inuit illegal - and how these traditions were eventually preserved - I realise that the exhibition seems to offer Danes and other visitors a very limited anthropological perspective on the Greenlandic Inuit drum dance. It focuses solely on its role in conflict resolution - but the drum means so much more to the culture than any means of handling conflict. It was a tool for entertainment, spirituality and a healthy community.

The Inuit who live in Greenland today derive from the so-called Thule People, who arrived around the year 1200 from Canada. When they arrived, they brought their performance culture with them through the means of drums, singing, drum dancing, mask dancing, lighting ceremonies and storytelling. When Greenland was colonised in the 18th century, the Danish missionary in charge, Hans Egede, and other missionaries who arrived were met with an Inuit culture that incorporated all of the aforementioned performative traditions in everyday life: they were all integrated parts of Inuit life in Greenland. The Inuit performative traditions were documented by European explorers in their diaries, letters and academic writings, and their descriptions are heavy with disapproval of the Inuit traditions. Within a short amount of time, pre-colonial performative practices were banned by the Danish colonial power who considered them as pagan.



Inuit - Nunatta Isiginnaartitsarfiq (2017)
Photo: Gerth Lyberth

The practices were stigmatised and harshly punished, while assimilation to European traditions was highly encouraged and rewarded. It did not take long before Inuit themselves began to shame each other for practising Inuit traditions. If we fast forward to the 1950s, the drum and mask dance traditions of Greenland's Southwest coast (where Danish colonisation was most prevalent) were non-existent, both officially and on a practical level. The performance rituals practised today consist of a fusion of elements derived from North or East Greenland and what the Tuukkaq Theatre cultivated in the 1970s and 1980s, which you can read more about below.

It is not easy to find sources that describe the cultivation of drum and mask dance in Southwest Greenland during the period of modernisation from World War II until the introduction of the Greenlandic Home Rule government in 1979. Nonetheless, a number of individuals from the period have recounted their experiences, witnessing secret gatherings featuring these traditions which often evoked mixed reactions from the audience. Is it dangerous? Why does it feel so powerful to witness? Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine exactly where these drum and mask dances came from or whom the practitioners had learned their art from.

Several factors make it difficult to ascertain the possible existence of drum and mask dance in Southwest Greenland. The first one has to do with archiving: these practices were subject to strong moralisation, favouring a Eurocentric approach to tradition and cultural practices. One could call it a moralising bias: we prefer to archive what we already recognise and agree with.

The historical anthropological or missionary archives are relevant in the sense that it is important to study the history of colonisation from the moralising and missionary point of view. When the missionaries met and communicated with Inuit in Greenland in order to Christianise them, what were they trying to achieve? An important thing to note is the lack of proper division between the religious and the academic. There are journals from Christian missionaries who translated their missionary work into academia. This would not have been acceptable today, but in the 18th century it was considered an appropriate form of research. An example of this comes from the Moravian (Christian) historian David Cranz, who went to Northern Greenland for research in 1761-62:

'I have neither heard of any quarrel, nor seen any angriness or jealousy among them. [...] As they believe in no deity and have no religion or authority, their mind is dumb and they lack affections; nothing stirs their nature or senses. [...] Only God knows if it will be possible to make these people suitable for faith'. (Cranz in Olsthorn, 2023).

To some, describing a group of people as 'dumb' so directly will come as a surprise - it doesn't to me. Describing the Inuit as without emotion is of course also untrue - however, the codes and culture around sharing emotions were different than those of Europeans, which is why Cranz could not read them. Including this citation allows me to point out two things: the way these colonists viewed Inuit and what they were hoping to achieve. This in itself is important for my work, because there should be no doubt that the ban on drum and mask dance was not due to self-censorship in the beginning of colonisation. There was a deeply rooted desire by very motivated missionaries to Christianise Inuit in Greenland, and this very emotional and moralising viewpoint has been the driving force behind a strongly stigmatising culture from 250-300 years ago.

There are several examples of sources written by European Christian missionaries or anthropologists describing Inuit spiritual practices, including performative traditions, as 'heathen' or even 'satanic'¹. William Thalbitzer, poet and 'Eskimo Researcher' (Eskimoforsker, ed.) wrote a frequently read, used and often cited article entitled 'The cultic deities of the Eskimos' in 1926. This article, as you can imagine, attempts to describe in no means comprehensively how the Inuit traditions and practices work. The title itself reveals a strongly moralising and judgemental point of view. This is not the only example, but it provides the necessary level of context for my point: Inuit were seen as stupid and their traditions were stigmatised as 'anti-holy'. Simultaneously, the uppermost these arctic explorers could achieve was to meet a group of Inuit who were not yet colonised. However, leaving their traditions alone was apparently not an option.

The second, main reason as to why it is difficult to know exactly what Inuit traditions consisted of on the South West coast of Greenland has to do with the archiving itself - it is much easier to archive the written word than an action or a spiritual journey. In contemporary performance studies, continuous efforts are being made to archive what happens live - as live performances or practices are difficult to capture with ink on paper. This is something we are much more aware of in modern archiving than when Inuit traditions were being removed from practices during the colonisation. In addition, European religious missionaries or Arctic explorers (Danes, Norwegians, Germans and more) have largely succeeded in their so-called 'soft' colonisation in Greenland. Christian religious beliefs have had a significant influence on the Inuit in Greenland, introducing an element of self-censorship or shaming of ancestral traditions.

There is yet another crucial aspect to consider: the drum, the mask and other traditions that have survived colonisation are inherently performative and rely on the presence of an audience. The way we employ these traditions and the emotions they evoke play a significant role in our understanding of what they mean and have meant to Inuit culture. The 'original' use of the drum in the 18th century would not have existed without an audience to play for - its revival in the 20th century also depended on an audience. Culturally, certain aspects of everyday life on the Greenlandic Southwest coast feel detached from the 'traditional' Inuit way of living - but the use of the drum does not. The power of experiencing these performance traditions strengthens the feeling that our roots are not cut off: Inuuvgut - *we are alive*, and so is our culture.

So, in what way is our culture alive today and how exactly did it survive? In order to understand that, we have to trace back through the years of trying to fit our ways into a new format.



Inuit - Nunatta Iqimaaftitsisaria (2017)
Photo Gerth Lyberth

A melting pot of traditions - seen from a Greenlandic performance-historical perspective

Hans Lyng (1906-1988) was a well-known Greenlandic artist and writer who adapted European theatrical traditions to Greenlandic ones through his work. He created plays in Kalaallisut (Greenlandic) specifically for a Greenlandic audience crafted by a Greenlander, thus establishing an overlap of traditions within the performing arts. This is significant in the way that it has established the space for Kalaallisut as a language in a theatrical setting. The representation of Kalaallisut on stage has allowed a way of thinking that includes Kalaallisut-speakers in the fine arts. Obviously, Kalaallit Inuit - *Greenlanders* - are indigenous people colonised by Europeans, specifically the Danish state, and it was somewhat of a natural step for the mix of Inuit and European culture to blend in this way. In Greenland, Kalaallisut is the most spoken language, and although Kalaallisut was not the official language in Greenland from 1953-1979, it is still considered one of the best maintained Indigenous languages in the Arctic today.

In the 1970s, Norwegian actor Reidar Nilsson established a theatre school on the West coast of Jutland, Denmark, called Tuukkaq. Here, aspiring actors - particularly those with Inuit roots - were introduced to acting practices including physical exercises and training in method acting, etc. Additionally, the school's management, teachers and students put a lot of energy into collectively revitalising forgotten Greenlandic traditions, specifically Southwest Greenlandic traditions.

In 1977, Tuukkaq premiered with their highly acclaimed production *Inuit*, a performance that explored what it means to be Inuit. The show consisted of a combination of text in Greenlandic, describing different narratives of inhabiting a colonised body, as well as mask dance and drum rhythms borrowed and sampled from Inuit communities.

The performance was filmed and broadcasted on national Greenlandic TV and went on tour in both Denmark and Greenland. Suddenly, Greenlandic popular culture became inclusive of drum and mask dance. Actress and playwright Makka Kleist, who was part of the Tuukkaq troupe, later expressed in the documentary film *Lykkelænder* that the forgotten or shamed Inuit elements 'lie just beneath the surface - but if we scratch the surface, they emerge'. Many Greenlandic Inuit had the exact same sensation when experiencing the performance; they felt an immediate connection with the drum and mask dance, but they never had access to it before.

The various members of the Tuukkaq troupe each have their own perception of how they arrived at that specific aesthetic expression of drum and mask dance.

¹ One of these texts is "Eskimoernes kultiske Guddomme", Thalbitzer, William. 1926.

Some say it was primarily borrowed from East Greenland, others claim it was the result of improvisation, where the actions evoked something that their bodies knew subconsciously. Yet, there are those who believe it was based on written sources recorded by European anthropologists a century earlier.

While it would be fantastic to understand exactly what influenced the outcome, the most important aspects to note in this context are the expressed consciousness of reclaiming Inuit traditions and the emergence of the foundation to create a new tradition for drum and mask dance in recent Greenlandic history.

Silamiut becomes the National Theatre

Several actors from Tuukkaq returned to Greenland without an established theatre to join or work at. The local theatre Silamiut was established in Nuuk in 1984, initially operating under sporadic and changing leadership. In its latest period, Silamiut was led by Sverre Syrin, a Norwegian actor and director married to the Greenlandic actress Makka Kleist. It was through their joint efforts leading up to the introduction of the Greenlandic Self Rule government that Silamiut was able to establish itself as the National Theatre in 2011 and obtain its own budget through the Theatre Act (see below).

With a budget in hand and obligations to create new productions and tours throughout Greenland, the theatre faced its greatest challenge - touring. The Arctic presents many difficulties for travelling due to its challenging infrastructure of ice, mountains and a low population density. However, the commitment to tour has proven fruitful. The touring of performances have helped connect larger towns with smaller ones and, on a practical level, facilitated greater language and culture exchange within Greenland.

In 2009, Greenland voted to expand the so-called Self Rule government, replacing the Home Rule government agreement with Denmark from 1979. The newly established government decided to establish laws protecting Inuit culture in Greenland by creating The Theatre Act, and Greenland's first ever actor training programme was established. It was initially a two-year programme that focused on method acting combined with instructions in Inuit traditions such as mask dance, drum dance, lamp lighting ceremonies, myths, legends and the history of these traditions.

It was decided that the training would be conducted in Kalaallisut and in English. This decision was made to strengthen the students' language skills beyond Danish, as there was a desire for a cultural change. For many years, Danish was considered the preferred language of education for many, and continues to be for some. The priority of the Danish language has had many implications for Kalaallisut-speaking Greenlanders and their educational opportunities, as well as limiting the need for primarily Danish-speaking Greenlanders to learn Kalaallisut. However, the cultural change was primarily aimed at prioritising student's mother tongue proficiency as well as English, which was considered the language that would create the greatest opportunities in terms of future employment.



Angakussaq - Nunatta Isiginnaartitsisarfia (2022)
Photo: Gerth Syrin

The development of the National Theatre

Alongside the emergence of the first generations of trained actors in Greenland, the National Theatre (Nunatta Isiginnaartitsisarfia) has gone through various phases. From 2011-2016, Norwegian actor, culture administrator and commentator Sverre Syrin was appointed as the National Theatre's first director. After its establishment, Syrin worked as the theatre's leader and director of roughly a third of its productions during his time there. Syrin will be remembered for his ability to create framework and continuity, his cultural bridge-building, his insistence on touring, his commitment to proper and professional working conditions and for his work across different genres. As a director, he will especially be remembered for his humour and acting skills.

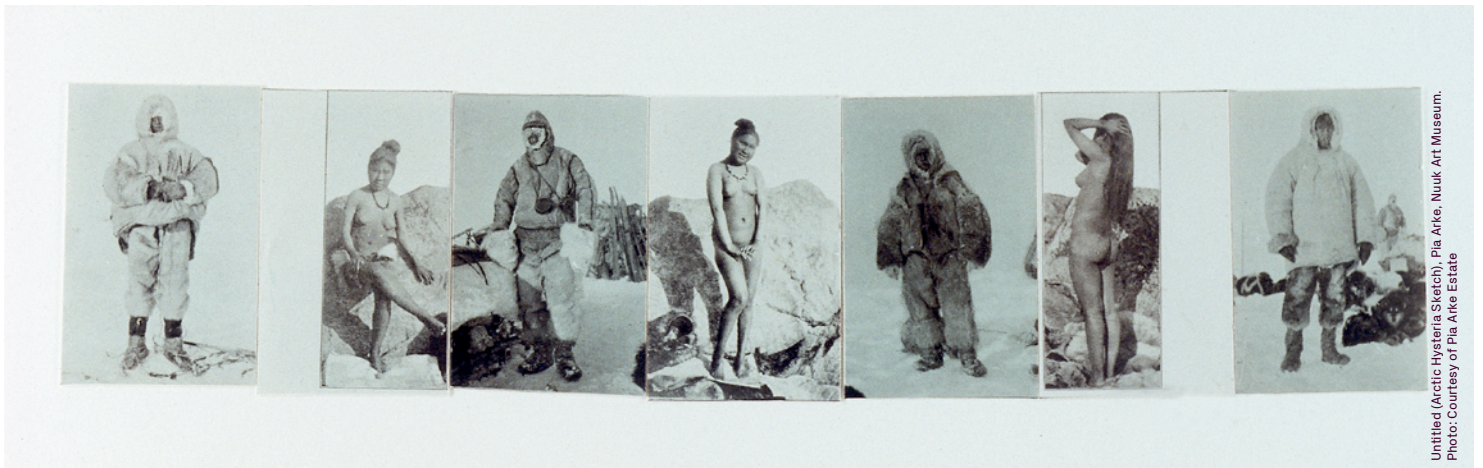
In 2016, Danish dramaturge and producer Susanne Andreasen took over the leadership of Nunatta Isiginnaartitsisarfia when Syrin retired. Andreasen paved the way to develop collaborations that have since strengthened the small National Theatre. This included partnerships with local businesses and - equally important - with international theatres and archives. During Andreasen's period as director, Nunatta Isiginnaartitsisarfia welcomed interns from Ilisimatusarfik (University of Greenland) and from abroad, in addition to hosting guest performances from the Nordic countries and beyond. Through these activities, the theatre has gained a wider outlook and built international connections that strengthen the knowledge within the institution and its role both within Greenland and abroad. Andreasen has not been afraid to enter the political arena and has strenuously fought for the theatre's financial stability. Today, the theatre's annual budget is 10 million DKK (1,350,000 EUR).

In June 2023, Nunatta Isiginnaartitsisarfia appointed its first Inuk leader, Vivi Sørensen, who was born and raised in Greenland. With her diverse educational background in journalism, acting and directing, Sørensen brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the position. Prior to becoming the leader of Nunatta Isiginnaartitsisarfia, she served as the head of the National Theatre's acting school.

This transition in leadership prompts us to reflect on the theatre's future vision. Together, Sørensen and Andreasen have successfully transformed the acting school into a three-year bachelor programme, while enabling Inuit people to lead and cultivate their own culture.

The process of introducing an Inuit-led national theatre has been a long one, despite the theatre's short history. It took a great deal of patience and dedication to create a thriving environment for Inuit actors who passed through the acting school. This achievement is a testament to the fact that the cultural community in Greenland no longer lies sleepless, worrying whether the drum and mask dance tradition is lost. It is alive - and it is thriving.

The security in one's own traditions and the quality of the education now allows the performing arts community to enjoy the fruits of their hard work. There is a sense of artistic freedom in the air. Art is created for the sake of art itself, and there is no obligation to define Greenlandic identity or Inukness through art to meet any domestic or international expectations. The focus lies on the pure expression of art, allowing it to flourish independently.



Untitled (Arctic Hysteria Sketch), Pia Arke, Nuuk Art Museum.
Photo: Courtesy of Pia Arke Estate

Late 20th and early 21st century performance artists and their influence

Several Greenlandic performance artists have been creating works since the 1980s and continue to do so today, with one example being the artist Jessie Kleemann. Over the past four decades, Kleemann has consistently produced works spanning various genres, establishing herself as one of the most prominent artists beyond Greenland. Kleemann works in the space between traditions, with exchanges of expectations between Danes and Kalaallit (Greenlanders), with the decolonial and the feminist. She writes poems, paints and creates video works as well as live performances. Her *Orsoq* series is among the most academically discussed performance series from Greenland. Kleemann is the artist of the Danish National Gallery's big solo exhibition in the fall of 2023.

It is also important to point out the significance of Pia Arke (1958-2007). Arke created works of art which encompass various mediums, including paintings, sculptures and photographs. However, it was her video performance piece *Arctic Hysteria*, permanently exhibited at Nuuk Art Museum, which has been canonised among many Greenlandic arts academics. In the video, Arke appears undressed, crawling on a large Greenland landscape photo. It seems as if she wants to crawl into the image - to get closer to it. Eventually, in desperation, Arke rips the photo into pieces.

Arke was also an academic. With her work *Ethno-aesthetics*, she successfully criticised the lack of understanding of what art from Greenland is and can be amongst Danish art academics and critics. She criticises the persistent description of Greenlandic art as 'applied' or 'practical.' She points to a Eurocentric bias in the way art from Greenland is described, and to the tendency to discuss art from Greenland and other colonised areas of the world as 'one type of art'.

In *Ethno-aesthetics*, Arke points out how 'bastards' - a term she uses to describe herself and people like her, referring to people of mixed Danish and Greenlandic backgrounds and cultural reference points - need a place that is safe, but does not yet exist. Not a Western community, not the colonised, 'othered' community - but one rooted in equality. She called it *The Third Place*.

Arke was based in Copenhagen. Today, a street artist who goes by the name *Landic Project* puts up mosaic stickers shaped like Greenland around the city, reminding the public that 'the third place' is one still to pursue. People who feel like they do not fit into the 'first' or the 'second' place may see the mosaics and be reminded that someone once tried to pursue a 'third' place there, thereby declaring that specific spot as such.

The conditions for dance in Greenland

Traditionally for Inuit, there has been no clear-cut division between theatre and dance; the performative traditions often involved a blend of storytelling and movement. In contemporary Western academic discourse, there is a similar tendency to rigidly avoid separating these practises and instead using the term 'performance' to encompass both theatre and dance. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that within the realm of movement and dance there are various specialised forms - such as ballet and hip-hop - which are enjoyed by many Greenlanders, particularly the younger generation.

Over the past thirteen years, Greenlandic children and youths have had the opportunity to take dance classes with dance instructor Ruth Montgomery-Andersen. The American-born dancer, midwife and professor has been living in Greenland for many years and has offered dance education through Qiajuk Studios.

Compared to dance as an art form, theatre in Greenland has had favourable conditions. Ruth Montgomery-Andersen has had to run a dance school without a proper stage and facilities that are not suitable for professional dancers, though the conditions are generally seen to be sufficient for afternoon classes for young children. As they grow up, a number of these young people may feel the passion and desire to develop their skills at a professional level, but they would have to seek opportunities for this outside Greenland.

This lack of professional dance infrastructure has created a broad gap between amateur dance activities for children in Greenland and professional dance schools abroad. Only few dancers have been able to take the leap often leaving them in vulnerable positions both personally and professionally, as it has meant moving far away from home - often to very intense social environments - at a young age.

In recent years, Ruth Montgomery-Andersen has been actively fundraising to open a dance centre in Nuuk called NuQi. Unfortunately, the centre is not part of the national budget, and as a result, dance is currently not recognised as an art form in itself that should be supported in Greenland.

The lack of support and recognition of dance in Greenland has resulted in a handful of professional performing dancers and choreographers from Greenland establishing themselves outside of Greenland. Dancers and choreographers such as Sarah Aviaaja Hammeken and Alexander Montgomery-Andersen are based in Denmark and Norway respectively, and while their art often visits Greenland, it seems impossible to maintain the independent field of dance within the borders of Greenland at the moment.

Alexander Montgomery-Andersen and Sarah Aviaaja Hammeken work together in productions such as *Kolonisterna* (Bobbi Lo Productions) and independently in productions across Scandinavia and the North Atlantic countries. Hammeken performed her piece *Sila* at Dansehallerne in 2022 and Andersen premiered his piece *Dualism* in 2023 which is a Danish and Norwegian co-production.

News from the independent field

A trend that has emerged with the increasing number of actors graduating from Nunatta Isiginnaartitsisarfia's drama school is the rise of small-scale productions, including children's shows, drumming workshops for children and youth and small travelling productions. An example of the latter is performer Kuluk Helms' *I Belong*, which recently premiered at Bådteatret in Copenhagen. The performance touches on topics of belonging, white-passing, everyday racism and discrimination. The performance also served as a starting point for the performance lecture *Performing Identity: Navigating cultural identities through the arts* during the IETM Aarhus Plenary Meeting 2023.

Self-producing artists in and from Greenland are finding new ways to tell their own stories, often based on an open-mind approach to blending genres and traditions which align naturally with the foundation of Nunatta Isiginnaartitsisarfia's drama school. For example, drums may be used solely to create an intensified atmosphere, rather than to remind us of the historical layers that such a drum might signify to a particular audience. Therefore, the drum becomes an integrated part of modern Indigenous storytelling - the living Inuit narratives to and about themselves and each other.

Greenlandic performers who have created material for decades are also invited into spaces in Denmark that are historically new to an Inuit tradition of storytelling. An example of this is *Our Stories // Oqaluttuatigut*, a Greenlandic/Danish production by Teater freezeProductions performed at CPH Stage festival in the summer of 2023. There is also a growing interest in including Inuit actors in large-scale Danish and international film and TV projects. An example of this is the major HBO production *True Detective's* fourth season which was filmed in Iceland and Canada during the winter of 2022-2023, featuring several Greenlandic actors. Another example is the acclaimed Danish TV series *Borgen*, which touched upon the concern of external interests wanting to mine Greenland's underground resources.

It seems that Greenland strongly appeals to new audiences, and people around the world are interested in seeing content from and about the country. Unfortunately, it is hard to determine if there is space for Greenlandic creators in the Danish and international festival scene. Often, Greenlandic Inuit artists are invited as an afterthought in order to add 'diversity and inclusion', which in itself is problematic. Established performing arts festivals and theatres have yet to extend their invitation to Inuit theatre makers or directors for large-scale productions. Productions in Denmark that focus on the complex Danish-Greenlandic relationship often revolve around the current situation in Greenland, mostly through a social-realistic lens. It would be interesting to see Danish producers either incorporate a Greenlandic Inuk perspective or at least engage Danish directors who are interested in colonial relations to dramatise the historical *Danish* involvement in Greenland. This approach would be more appropriate than the impossible attempt of speaking on behalf of an Indigenous people.

Beyond the Denmark-Greenland relationship, there is a growing emphasis on allowing minorities to tell their own stories. Audiences in Denmark are also becoming more critical - they no longer accept Danish creators to produce stories about Greenland but instead want productions from the Greenlanders themselves. Therefore, there is a hope that Danish producers will make space for Greenlandic artists, as their audience seems ready to receive art from a bottom-up perspective - where Greenlanders and Inuit themselves create and curate their own performances.



Performing Identity, Kuluk Helms, IETM Aarhus 2023
Photo: Gorm Branderup



Tappavani Inunnguaq Taama (2009)
Photo: unknown
On the photo: Mike Thomsen

Conclusion: New theatre, old performance

The Greenlandic performing arts has a long and proud history which dates far back and has been through dynamic developments. Unfortunately, it has also been subject to the gaze, motivation and opinion of others - people who do not fully comprehend the interconnectedness of performance with the broader Inuit culture. There is a need for research into the repercussions of removing the performative elements of the Greenlandic culture. For example - how has the removal of the drum dance affected the rituals of childbirth, seasonal celebrations or the Inuit perception of death? Undoubtedly, the removal of these performative elements has diminished the poetic meaning inherent in the life rituals of the Greenlandic Inuit. The Inuit performance culture is ancient and has survived near-extinction. The people who initiated Tuukkaq had the opportunity to gather insights and experiences from some of the oldest living Greenlandic Inuit drum dancers. Their work played a pivotal role in preserving the tradition and preventing it from slipping into extinction.

A lot of the development of Greenlandic theatre has happened despite the Danish colonisation, and the ability to express Greenlandic Inuit traditional performance culture is a sign of empowerment. The performing arts has been going through a massive development in Greenland and has never been as strong and diverse as it is now. The growth of the acting school and the National Theatre has been pivotal in the development of Greenland's cultural sector. The performing arts help us understand Greenlandic culture not only through language and dramaturgy, but also through the sensation of experiencing the drum and mask traditions.

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Angakusseq - Nunatta Isigimaartitsisarfiia (2022)
Photo: Gerth Lybeith

