



MEDIA RELEASE

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Inuit art acquired by Art Gallery of Hamilton, public exhibit planned

HAMILTON, ON - A collection of Inuit art that recalls Hamilton's storied role in fighting tuberculosis (TB) is being moved to the Art Gallery of Hamilton from the Chedoke site of Hamilton Health Sciences.

The 132-piece collection of sculptures and prints includes work made by Inuit patients from the eastern Arctic, who were treated for TB in the 1950s and early 1960s at the Hamilton Mountain Sanatorium, as the hospital was then called.

"The gift of this significant collection to the AGH ensures a broader and more profound recognition of Inuit art," says Shelley Falconer, President and CEO of the Art Gallery of Hamilton. "The Chedoke Collection's important ethnohistory, from Canada's largest and principal Inuit hospital treating tuberculosis in the 1950s and 60s, reflects a range of creative ideas and experiences. The AGH is deeply grateful to all the Inuit artists who embraced and created this distinctly characteristic expression. The acquisition is an important first step in our commitment to broadening the Canadian mandate and integrating Indigenous voices into our permanent collection and program."

Falconer says the collection will constitute a major public exhibition at the AGH in 2017. "We want to tell the story of the Inuit in Hamilton and the role that the local community played in eradicating the epidemic of TB in northern Canada."

Hamilton Health Sciences President and CEO Rob MacIsaac says the collection has been kept on display at the former Chedoke Hospital site, but a new home was needed since Hamilton Health Sciences will exit the site later this year. "We're very proud of the hospital's history and the story behind this collection, but looking forward we felt that the city and the AGH are the most appropriate custodians of the art so that the public will have better access to it," he said.

MacIsaac says a donor who wishes to remain anonymous purchased the collection from Hamilton Health Sciences at its appraised value and then donated it to the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

“The funds from this sale will be dedicated entirely to enhancing our care for indigenous patients and their families, with an emphasis on creating welcoming environments,” he said. “One of the first projects is a family room to be created at McMaster Children’s Hospital.”

In total, close to 1,300 Inuit patients were treated at the Sanatorium between the mid-1950s and early 1960s. Retired Chedoke Hospital nurse Hilda Ferrier, 93, worked at the Sanatorium, and then Chedoke Hospital, from 1952 to 1984 and recalls seeing the patients sitting up in bed carving soapstone.

“It was a godsend, it gave them a purpose. And it was a way to tell the world about what their life was like in the north.” She’s enthusiastic about the collection’s move to the Art Gallery: “I feel very good about that. It needs a home where everyone can appreciate it.” <http://bit.ly/28YU97c>

Well-known Inuit artists included in the collection are Kenojuak Ashevak, Guy Mamataiq, Moses Meeko, Noona, Alivaktak Petaloosie, Simon POV, Mikisiti Saila, and Kanayuk Tukulak.

CONTACT:

Cynthia Janzen, Manager, Stakeholder Relations, Hamilton Health Sciences
[T] 905-521-2100, ext. 75313 or 905-516-1878
[E] janzenc@hhsc.ca

Steve Denyes, Manager, Communications, Art Gallery of Hamilton
[T] 905.527.6610, ext. 255
[E] steve@artgalleryofhamilton.com

BACKGROUNDER

ABOUT HAMILTON HEALTH SCIENCES

Hamilton Health Sciences includes six hospitals and five specialized facilities and has the largest healthcare team in Ontario with 15,000 staff, physicians and volunteers. As a teaching hospital affiliated with McMaster University, HHS is also an international leader in hospital-based research and innovation and one of the top two hospitals in Canada in the amount of research funding it attracts. More than 1,500 investigators and research staff attract \$300 million annually.

ABOUT THE ART GALLERY OF HAMILTON

Founded in 1914, the Art Gallery of Hamilton is the oldest and largest public art gallery in southwestern Ontario. Its permanent collection, which is focused on historical Canadian, 19th-century European and Contemporary art, now numbers more than 10,000 works and is recognized as one of the finest in Canada. The AGH is a vital creative hub and centre of lifelong learning that enables people of all ages to enrich their lives by gaining a deeper understanding of art. Visit www.artgalleryofhamilton.com for more information.

ABOUT THE COLLECTION

While the Inuit patients were at the Mountain Sanatorium, their carvings and beaded craft pieces were sold at the San Shop on James St South, with the money going back to the patients. When the shop closed, pieces that hadn't sold were turned back to the hospital. Some pieces purchased from the shop were also donated back to Chedoke Hospital. In the early 1990s the collection came out of storage and was put on display at Chedoke in custom-made cabinets.

TRANSFER TO THE ART GALLERY OF HAMILTON

In preparation for transfer to the Art Gallery of Hamilton, each piece was carefully wrapped, labelled and packaged, a process that took the better part of a week. Over the next year the Art Gallery of Hamilton will create the exhibition that will open for public viewing in 2017.

THE CURATOR

Marvin Cohen, owner of Arctic Experience McNaught Gallery in Hamilton, was the curator of the collection from the early 1990s until it moved to the Art Gallery of Hamilton. He calls himself "privileged to have helped preserve and maintain this important part of Hamilton's cultural and art history."

Cohen notes that neither beadwork or sculpture of the type done at the Sanatorium is a historic or spiritual form of expression for Canada's Inuit; it began in the late 1940s as a form of economic development encouraged by the federal government. The carvings depict familiar scenes and images from Inuit life such as hunters holding spears and surfacing polar bears.

"I am happy that this collection of important works of art will now be available to a much wider audience at the AGH. The sculpture was produced at a time in the 1950s when two disparate cultures came together, and has been a lasting gift to the hospital, and now the City of Hamilton."

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[E] steve@artgalleryofhamilton.com