

The Story of the Seal Design

Navigating the New Arctic Community Office



We honor the traditional homelands of the hundreds of Arctic Indigenous Peoples who are the original stewards and caretakers of the Arctic since time immemorial. The recognition of Indigenous homelands and territories is a foundation in building a better future with shared responsibility. To acknowledge the land is an act of gratitude and respect.



“

Traditional knowledge or understanding of the relationship between the seal and the hunter is what keeps the seal alive, but it is an understanding and relationship that sustains life itself.”

– Joseph Senungetuk

The Arctic Arc (1988)

by Joseph Senungetuk & David Barr
Kinigin (Wales, Alaska)



The Process

In Fall 2021, a small team came together to discuss the creation of a logo design for the Navigating the New Arctic Community Office (NNA-CO). The NNA-CO was created to build capacity awareness, partnerships, opportunities, and resources for collaboration and equitable knowledge generation. Additionally, The NNA-CO seeks to provide unique opportunities to inspire and engage a wide audience toward a more holistic understanding of the National Science Foundation’s Navigating the New Arctic Initiative and of the Arctic natural environment, built environment, and diverse cultures and communities.

Team members Matthew Druckenmiller, Jenna Vater, James Temte (Northern Cheyenne), Karli Tyance Hassell (Anishinaabe), Alaska Native artists Joseph (Iñupiaq) and Martha (Unanga) Senungetuk, and graphic designer Sebastian Garber (Athabaskan) came together to discuss a vision for the NNA-CO logo design and significance. Through this process, the team not only focused on the design concept and significance, but discussed broader impacts of climate change, the history of research, Indigenous protocols and values, and working together towards leaving a positive legacy among Arctic spaces.



"In the Twentieth Century: Where goes the Spirit of the Shaman?"

Lithograph & colored ink

Give or Take A Century: An Eskimo Chronicle (Memoir) by Joseph Senungetuk



"Protect the Sacred"

Seal oil lamp, sage & cedar wood container

by Martha Senungetuk

Seal Design Origins

The seal design, a version of ancient Iñupiaq artwork, was first sketched by Joe from ancestral memory. One of the first appearances of the design can be found in Joe's memoir *Give or Take a Century: An Eskimo Chronicle* and in his piece titled "In the Twentieth Century: Where goes the Spirit of the Shaman?" on page 130. Joe imagines the harmony of the seal and the hunter as they both look to each other with understanding that the seal holds traditional knowledge of the lands and waters that keeps the seal alive, but also offers its life as a gift for the hunter and to their community.

A version of the seal design, and the basis for the NNA-CO logo, now resides on his wife Martha's ceremonial seal oil lamp container. The seal sketch sits on top of a cedar container that holds a seal oil lamp that her father gifted many years ago in Prince William Sound, Alaska. "It is used for prayer and celebrating good things happening around us," says Martha. In addition, the seal oil lamp holds sacred meaning and significance because, "It has provided lighting and heat for Arctic Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial. The practice of lighting the seal oil lamp is ceremony and the light it carries is intergenerational," says Joe.

In the seal design, Joe utilizes an art technique that depicts the seal's inner workings; the seal's ribs are shown followed by its intestines and other insides. In fact, many Indigenous Peoples across the world utilize an "x-ray vision" technique in art forms and drawing. Archaeologists and art collectors use the "x-ray vision" terminology frequently. There is connection to spirit and what is portrayed inside - often following "heartlines" that signify lines of power, communication, or prophecy. In a simplistic way, you can see through an animal or plant with different parts of the beings connected to each other. The x-ray vision portrays their true form or spirit that is grounded with intention and heart.

Uummatiñ Iñuuruq

Iñupiaq, Northwest/North Slope (NW/NS) dialect

"Your heart is alive."

As the team discussed the mission and goals of the NNA-CO and long-term vision for the NNA program, a common understanding became apparent. The focus of the research process must center equity and support change in the Arctic. This process must navigate across knowledge systems, ways of knowing, scientific disciplines, languages, lands and waters, generations, or boundaries across various scales and time. As we think about our purpose and our relational accountability to people and place in the Arctic, we often utilize our heart as a guide to foster, forage and nurture these relationships with each other. "Uummatiñ Iñuuruq" is translated by Ronald H. Brower Sr. (Iñupiaq language instructor) to "your heart is alive" in the North West/North Slope Iñupiaq dialect.

"My heart is alive."

Uumatiga iñuuruq (Iñupiaq, NW/NS dialect)

Uummatiñ inuuzhuq (Iñupiaq, Seward Peninsula dialect)

- translations provided by Mellisa Maktuayaq Johnson
Co-chair of the NNA-CO Indigenous Advisory Board

"Traditional knowledge or understanding of the relationship between the seal and the hunter is what keeps the seal alive, but it is an understanding and relationship that sustains life itself," says Joe. The heart is a common element among us all and we must use our heart to understand our complex shared history and recognize the role we all have in contributing to transformative or institutional changes to support shared research and community needs. Martha goes on to say, "We care about the Land, and its people. As we navigate the changing Arctic, we look to our seal relation as a teacher who spends part of its life on the ice and in the waters. The seal reminds us to use your heart in solving complex problems together. The seal has knowledge. The Indigenous people of the Arctic have knowledge. The researchers or scientists have knowledge. Together we have a solution."



Kinigin (Wales, Alaska)

photo from Joseph Senungetuk archives

About the Artists

“ Art is a way to bring the past into the present
and it helps shape the future.”

- *Joseph Senungetuk*



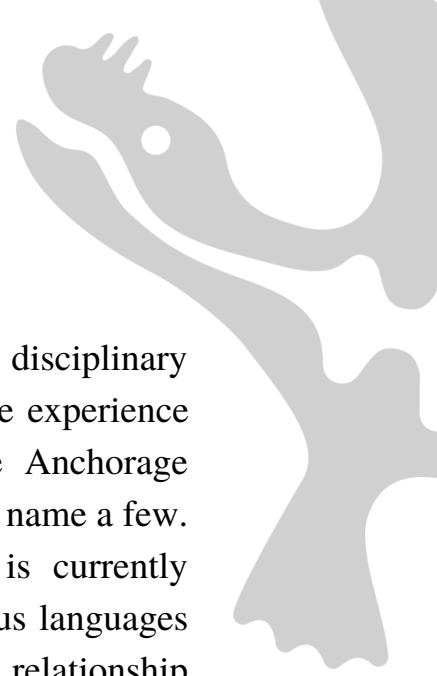
Joseph Senungetuk is an Iñupiaq artist originally from Wales, Alaska and grew up in Nome, Alaska. He now lives in Anchorage with his wife, **Martha Senungetuk**, who is also an artist and educator. Joseph attended the San Francisco Arts Institute in California, which helped shape his view on the culture shifts and differences between Alaska Natives and those living in big cities in the lower 48. He has also taught art at Mt. Edgecumbe High School and Sheldon Jackson Junior College in Sitka, Alaska. Joe is a multi-disciplinary artist who works in a variety of mediums including illustration, wood carving, mask making, sculpture and writing. However, he specializes in wood carvings and mask making. Martha (Unangaâ), who is from Cordova, Alaska, is an artist, educator, and activist with expertise in counseling psychology and has dedicated her life to serving tribal communities and organizations in various capacities. Passionate in creating pieces from mixed media, Martha draws inspiration from the lands and waters. Her father, the late John Jay Hoover, was also a well-known artist and sculptor.

Education and art have always gone hand-in-hand. Joe and Martha have spent their lives using their experiences, knowledge, creativity and art practices to educate and reach out to Alaskan Native youth and non-native peoples alike. Joe and Martha have used their positions to help shape policy and implement ideas for best practices and pedagogy to benefit Alaskan Native Youth and Alaskan Artists. In recent years, Joe and Martha have served as Elder Artists-in-Residence at Alaska Pacific University and have held workshops and classes in the art studio. Joe and Martha hope that art will inspire future generations of artists and Alaska Native Youth to express themselves and speak through creativity.

About the Graphic Designer



Sebastian Garber has worked as a multi disciplinary designer for over a decade with extensive experience working for clients such as Nike, The Anchorage Museum, ESPN, and Backcountry.com to name a few. Born and raised in Alaska, Sebastian is currently developing a mural inspired by Indigenous languages of Alaska. The project explores the relationship between Indigenous representation in graphic design and popular culture, and poses the question “What would an Indigenous augmented reality project look like?”





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Special thanks to:
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Mellisa Maktauyaq Johnson
The NNA-CO Team



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Visit nna-co.org for more informaion.