



THE DARKROOM PROJECT

TALOYOAK, 1972–1973



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Selena Tucktoo

Mose and Da[v?] and Sarah
Jayko Collecting Lichen, 1973
Gelatin silver print
12.6 x 14.3 cm



Theresa Quaqjuaq *Untitled*, 1973 Gelatin silver print 12.7 x 12.7 cm

Pamel Anothe Toron Book 26 x 2

Pamel Arnau Gelati 20.3 x

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THE DARKROOM PROJECT

an introduction

In 1972, Pamela Harris, a Toronto-based self-taught photographer, visited her friend, Judy McGrath, an artist who had recently moved with her family to Taloyoak, Nunavut (at the time Spence Bay, Northwest Territories). During this visit, Harris heard about the residents' interest in learning about photography. A year later, she returned to Taloyoak for four months to establish a community darkroom, photograph the people and the landscape, and conduct interviews. With the help and enthusiasm of community members, predominantly Selena Tucktoo, Theresa Quaqjuaq and Ootookee (Tookie) Takolik, Harris constructed a darkroom where she taught local residents, mainly Inuit craftswomen, how to develop and print their own photographs.

The practice of photography was not new to Taloyoak residents; however, rolls of film had to be sent over 1,000 kilometres away to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, for processing, effectively rendering the community dependent on inaccessible commercial photo labs. The establishment of the darkroom provided a more autonomous and faster process. It was a collaborative space open to those interested in processing and printing photographs. As a result, photographs taken and printed by Taloyoak residents—including Tucktoo, Quaqjuaq and Takolik—were presented in 1974 in Toronto at the Arctic Women's Workshop, a craft conference, and an exhibition held at the TD Centre. Additionally, some of their photographs were used in various government documents and advertisements

The darkroom allowed residents of Taloyoak to develop and share their own photographs for the first time. This provided them greater control over the process and thus the ability to represent themselves and their perspective. This publication includes a selection of photographs and documents, now part of the Art Gallery of Ontario's collection, which offers a counter-narrative to stereotypical photographic depictions of Inuit populations to broader Southern audiences.

"The reason I want to do this is that I like Spence Bay and I want to come back and spend some time, but I would like to have something to do, and this is something I can do: I like taking pictures, but I would like to have that process be useful to other people. So this may make it more useful. ... Wherever it went, whatever we did with it, that would be up to them."

Pamela Harris In correspondence with Judy McGrath 28 January 1973



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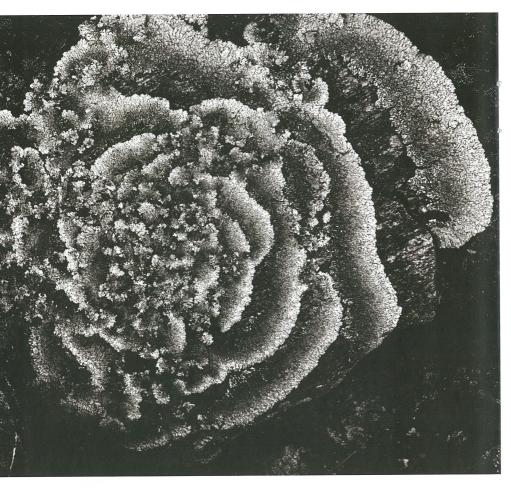
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Pamela Harr [Nilauloq in darkroom], 197 Gelatin silver prir 20.2 x 25.4 cr



Pamela Harris Lichen, 1972-1973 Gelatin silver print 15.2 x 18.1 cm

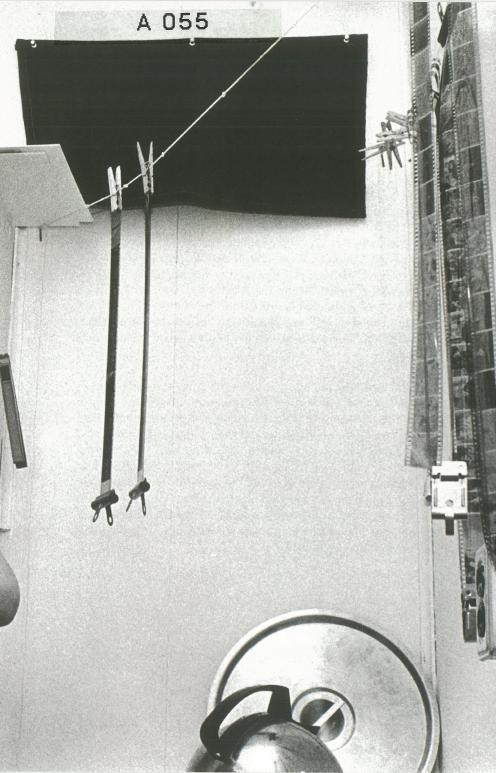
"I hope you'll come soon. I would really want to learn how to make pictures ... you can use one of the bedrooms for the darkroom."

Theresa Quaqjuaq In correspondence with Pamela Harris 14 February 1973



Theresa Quaqju [Outdoor teatime], 19 Gelatin silver pr 15.3 x 15.1 d





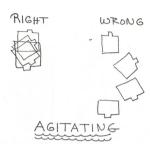
SETTING UP THE DARKROOM

materials and funding

The documents and correspondence held at the Art Gallery of Ontario reveal that the concept of a community darkroom was popular among the residents of Taloyoak. However, practical logistics did not prove to be easy. To ensure her project's success, Harris needed financial assistance to obtain and transport photographic equipment and materials to Taloyoak. Harris successfully applied to the Canada Council for the Arts for a grant, and received additional support from the National Film Board (NFB) Stills Division and the Northwest Territories Government. Kodak Canada also donated an abundance of photo-chemical materials and film supplies.

Another challenge was finding a location to set up the darkroom, as space within Taloyoak was limited. The community and Harris decided to establish the darkroom in the restroom of the women's craft shop. Owned and run by the community, the shop was already being used by Judy McGrath and the local craftswomen, where they were creating natural dyes and woolen materials, such as clothing. Most of the four months Harris spent in Taloyoak in 1973 were dedicated to assembling the necessary components to complete the darkroom. Materials such as a sink or even plywood were not readily available—even the running water needed to process film and paper was lacking, although a specific water reservoir was eventually obtained.

Previous page: Pamela Harris Selena Tucktoo in Darkroom, 1973 Gelatin silver print 20.2 x 25.4 cm (10)



Theright way to agitate: TURN THE TANK
UPSIDE DOWN & THEN RIGHT SIDE UP AGAIN.

DO NOT WAVE THE CAN THROUGH THE AIR.

AGITATE: Whenever you put in a new chemical, agitate for the first 30 seconds. 30 seconds of the first 10 seconds in

AND THEN for the first 10 second every minute 10 seconds -





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Agitation instructions (English and Inuktitut) 1973 Pamela Harris and Unknown Creator Pamela Harris Spence Bay Collection CA OTAG SC126

"The only other possibility I can think of is the room in the craft workshop (there is no water at the co-op and temperature cannot be controlled or made high enough). If you were to work with one or two people at a time that place might work."

Judy McGrath In correspondence with Pamela Harris 1 March 1973



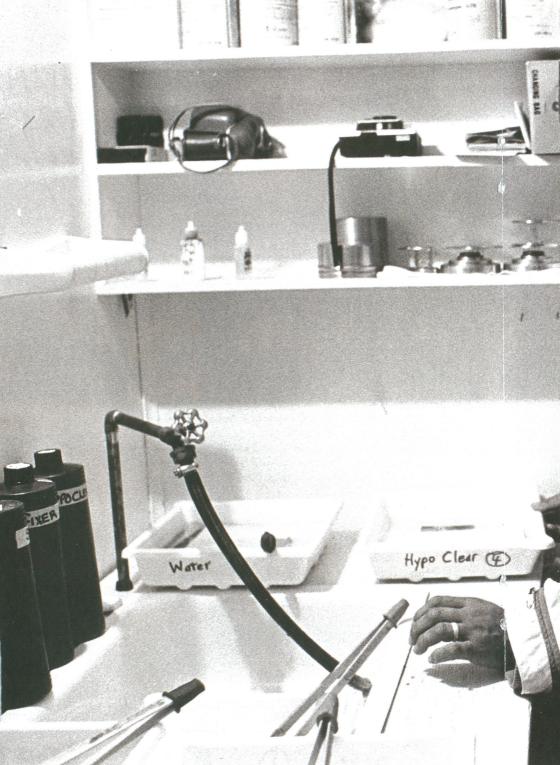
Theresa Quaqjuaq [Quvuvuq Poodlat collecting lichen with baby], 1973 Gelatin silver print 17.3 x 24 cm

In addition to these physical constraints, communication also proved difficult. Harris spoke very little Inuktitut or Netsilik, the local languages, and few members of the community spoke English. As a solution, Harris translated words and concepts into familiar terms and illustrations, and wrote a "How-To" guide in English that members of the community translated into Inuktitut. This was accessible to anyone, including Takolik, who is deaf-mute and could only communicate through sign language. While the darkroom was not intended to be gender-specific, its location in a female-centric space meant that women were the primary participants. Harris taught entirely through demonstration during one-on-one sessions, and the photographers would always work on their own prints.

"Most important: it is not to cost the community anything, and they will have a darkroom at the end. Warning: this will materialize only if I get funded, I cannot afford it on my own, and perhaps it would be wrong to get their hopes up because if I don't get the \$\$\$ for the darkroom I would come anyhow myself. Use your judgement, tell them I'm working on it."

"About space:... I wouldn't mind the small bathroom at your studio. In fact, the idea of tying into that project is very inviting, because it might insure [sic] that more women get involved with photography, but wouldn't it be overloading that house?... Also, and most of all, water... Is there running water at the school? We could if necessary, wash prints up there, carrying them in a bucket (covered) sounds like a big hassle, though. Washing film is more problematic because that not only needs running water, but needs to be done quickly and not carried up hills, etc. Also, the storage tank in the studio is so small. I know water will be a problem anywhere....
Photography needs water. If you don't have water and don't rinse films and prints properly, they fade—and soon."

Pamela Harris In correspondence with Judy McGrath August 1973

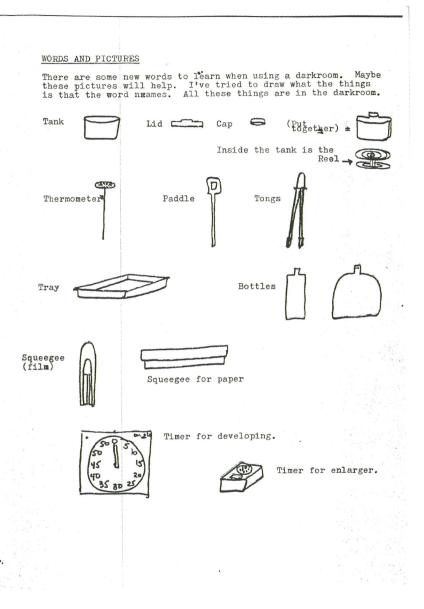




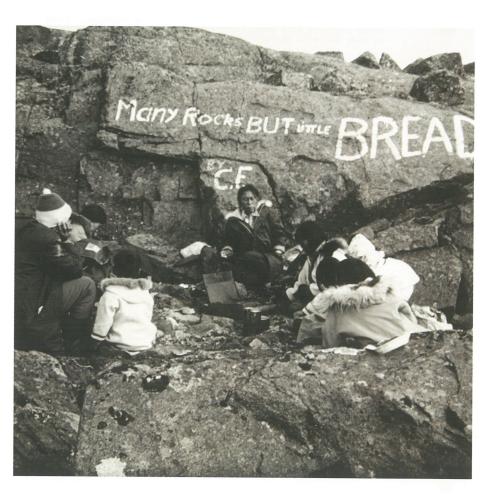


Selena Tucktoo [Tookie and children playing near shore], 1973 Gelatin silver print $14.1 \times 17.3 \text{ cm}$

Previous Page: Pamela Harris Nilaulog and Willie in Darkroom, 1973 Gelatin silver print 20.2 x 25.4 cm



Darkroom Tools (English), 1973 Pamela Harris Pamela Harris Spence Bay Collection CA OTAG SC126



Selena Tucktoo [Many rocks but little bread], 1973 Gelatin silver print 17.3 x 17.5 cm

The participants of the dye workshop and the darkroom project often overlapped, and this allowed the two groups to work harmoniously with one another. In 1973, the Department of Economic Development of Northwest Territories commissioned a handful of Taloyoak photographers to document Judy McGrath's dye workshop. The Darkroom Project, as Harris's initiative became known, offered the community a tool for constructing and developing a photographic archive, assisting in the preservation of their own personal narratives and the history of Taloyoak, autonomous from external mediation.

"We have a darkroom in Spence Bay now. It's in the women's workshop. Pam Harris brought it to Spence Bay. She asked some people if they'd like to learn how to develop their own pictures. First she taught us how to use the cameras and then she taught us how to do the film and what kind of chemicals to use. Then after that she showed us how to print the pictures and how to use the enlarger. She showed us everything. She even taught us how to tone the pictures—to turn them brown."

Selena Tucktoo, Mary Omeamuk, Tookie Takolik From the report "Learning to Make Pictures" 1973

[&]quot;We're glad we learned."

SELENA TUCKTOO

in conversation with Alex Robichaud

- A: I saw the photograph you took when you were collecting lichens for the dye workshop—can you talk a little about that? What was that experience like? Did you know you were going to use those photos for an exhibition or for publications or were you just taking them for fun? What was the purpose?
- S: She [Pamela Harris] taught us how to do all kinds of stuff with the camera and the lens and all that. How to take close up and how we could crop the picture when we develop it, and [the lichen image] was from one of those projects. I was really getting interested in the idea so therefore I took quite a few pictures of ladies walking to pick up plants, [focusing on] details of them, like pictures of their backs and ... [images of] burning heather to make hot tea.... Those were taken during the summer, the first time I started taking pictures I used to really wonder how they were gonna turn out. It was pretty interesting.
- A: I don't know if you remember these images, but I really love two you took in particular: one that says "Spence Bay" on the rocks, and one of a woman walking.
- S: Oh yes, that one was painted by the minister who lived near the lake. I guess he and his family decided to paint that on the rock. That was already there when we were going out on the land to pick up plants and stuff and taking pictures of it.
- A: There was also writing that said "many rocks but little bread." Do you remember that?
- S: Yes, that was like, I see that too. My siblings, every now and then we go camping ... when we have no place to pitch our tent: many rocks but little bread [laughter].
- A: Has The Darkroom Project had any influence on you or your life to this day? Do you still take pictures?

S: In a way, yes, it did, because we look at a lot of old pictures, even before the darkroom, and we talk about them—how we lived long ago. They tell a good story and we talk to these younger people about them and they're pretty interested in the pictures that we used to take and how interesting it was to develop them and what kind of chemicals we had to use and how long they had to be in each chemical and stuff like that.

A: Do you still have them?

S: Yes, I have few of them here... I'm not throwing them away. No, I'm keeping them.

A: Is photography still being taught in Taloyoak?

- S: Not that I know of, no. Because a lot of people have iPods and digital cameras and TVs, stuff like that, that they can look at and just put their pictures on TV.
- A: Yes, it's much easier. I miss the old way though; it's so nice to develop your own photos, as you know.
- S: Yes, that was fun. Although it was only in black and white, it was fun, like, how we could make the picture or make it darker and stuff like that. That was fun.
- A: So one last question. What do you think of your photography being held in the Art Gallery of Ontario's collection where it is now? What do you think about that and the fact that we're putting on an exhibition? What's your opinion on that?
- S: Three weeks ago when you talked about that—oh my gosh, I wondered if my pictures were good enough to put on the wall. I started going back to 1974 thinking, "oh, we had fun," and some of them must've been pretty good if you were interested in them. I'm very happy to know the pictures are being put to that use a bit. I was very honoured when I heard about it.

TALOYOAK TODAY

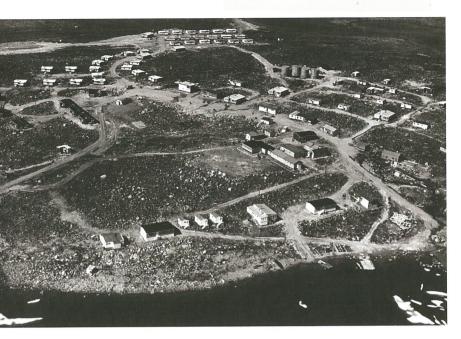
legacy of the darkroom project

During Harris's first visit to Taloyoak in 1972, she noted that the community had been undergoing substantial changes. Leaving behind a mostly nomadic way of life, families had begun moving into prefabricated housing and adopting more Southern habits, including the purchase of mass-produced goods, clothing and food.

Canada's imposed system of residential schools saw Indigenous children assimilated into Southern culture and stripped of their native languages and traditions. Upon returning home, these children were often alienated from their communities, unable to integrate and communicate with the elders. The construction of a new school in 1974 allowed Taloyoak's younger generations to stay close to home and to their culture, families and language.

The population of the community has doubled since the time Harris visited the area, from 450 to over 800 residents today. Taloyoak has recently participated in many Inuit Heritage Fund projects, such as the Place Names Project (2002) and the Archaeological and Oral History Project (2005), both ensuring younger generations learn about their history and heritage. These projects have helped to preserve the Netsilik language, which was close to being lost in the 1970s, as noted by Harris.

Historically, non-Indigenous photographers, such as Robert Flaherty and Richard Harrington, have created the majority of images depicting Indigenous peoples, perpetuating stereotypes and Southern ideologies. Through The Darkroom Project, Inuit photographers produced work that documented and applied to their own life experiences. Since participants of the project had autonomy over their own visual representation, they were able to convey a narrative that contrasted previously established portrayals. The photographs resulting from this project provide intimate perspectives into Inuit ways of life in Taloyoak during the early 1970s.



Pamela Harris Spence Bay from the Air, 1972–1973 Gelatin silver print 27.9 x 35.6 cm (mount)

"There are more people who want to learn about the darkroom, how to do their own pictures. We will teach them ourselves because now Pam won't be here anymore; she's going out. Some of us know enough to teach other people."

Selena Tucktoo, Mary Omeamuk, Tookie Takolik From the report "Learning to Make Pictures" 1973



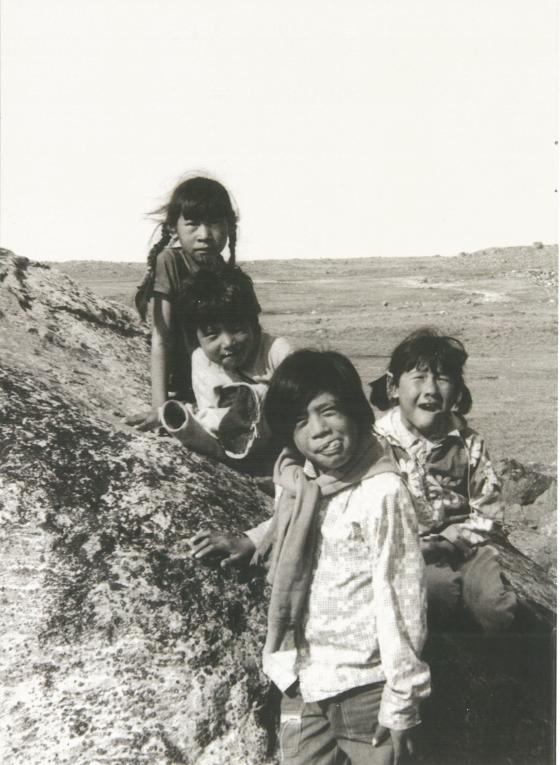
Theresa Quaqjuaq [Arnauyuq Kneeling on Rock], 1973 Gelatin silver print 14.8 x 15 cm

"I was thinking maybe if someone in the government or a teacher wants a picture, I could make it for them—only if they want me to. Maybe they'll know I can print pictures and maybe they'll ask me. I wouldn't mind helping people in town. The whole lot of pictures I did, I'm thinking of doing them all—cause if I send them out I'd have them all; so I won't have to send them out—so I do my own pictures. I feel so different—I can do it myself (rather than paying; rather than waiting a long time)—knowing I can do it myself."

Selena Tucktoo From the report "Learning to Make Pictures" 1973

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WORKS EXHIBITED

Pamela Harris Another Way of Being, 1976 Toronto: Impressions Book 26 x 22 cm

Pamela Harris Arnauyuq and Baby Sandra, With Ulu, 1972-1973 Gelatin silver print 20.3 x 25.4 cm

Pamela Harris

Children Running on Tundra, 1972-1973

Gelatin silver print

14.9 x 22.4 cm

Pamela Harris [Contact sheet 33], 1973 Gelatin silver print 20.3 x 25.4 cm

Pamela Harris Igjookjuak's Wall: Elvis, Grandson, Carving, Eaton's Slip, Southern Landscape Behind, 1972-1973 Gelatin silver print 20.3 x 25.4 cm

Pamela Harris

Kakateenik Making My Mother

Hubbard Parka, 1972-1973

Gelatin silver print

20.3 x 25.4 cm

Pamela Harris Lichen, 1972-1973 Gelatin silver print 15.2 x 18.1 cm Pamela Harris Loui and Friend in the Darkroom, 1973 Gelatin silver print $20.2 \times 25.4 \text{ cm}$

Pamela Harris
Nilaulaq Fingerweaving on the Way
to Netsilik River Camp, 1973
Gelatin silver print
16.3 x 25.6 cm

Pamela Harris [Nilaulaq in darkroom], 1973 Gelatin silver print 20.2 x 25.4 cm

Pamela Harris Nilauloq and Willie in Darkroom, 1973 Gelatin silver print 20.2×25.4 cm

Pamela Harris
Ootokee Takolik at Arctic Women's Craft
Conference 1974, Toronto, 1974
Gelatin silver print
15.2 x 19.4 cm

Pamela Harris
Selena Tucktoo in the Darkroom, Taloyoak, 1973
Gelatin silver print
20.2 x 25.4 cm

Pamela Harris Sign, 1972-1973 Boots, 1972-1973 Gelatin silver prints Mount: 27.9 x 35.6 cm

WORKS EXHIBITED

Pamela Harris Spence Bay from the Air, 1972-1973 Gelatin silver print 27.9 x 35.6 cm

Pamela Harris
The Day the Boat Came In: Dead
Seal, Seven-Up, 1972-1973
Gelatin silver print
10.7 x 17.3 cm

Pamela Harris The Spence Bay Darkroom [Grant Report], n.d. Text on paper 28×21.7 cm

Pamela Harris
Tookie Photographing Pam, Arctic Women's
Craft Conference, Toronto, 1974
Gelatin silver print
15.3 x 19.3 cm

Ministry of Indian and Northern Affairs Arctic Women's Workshop Catalogue, 1974 Publication 27.5 x 21.5 cm

North / Nord Journal, 1974 Magazine Closed: 27.8 x 21.7 cm

Selena Tucktoo, Mary Omeamuk, Tookie Takolik About Our Darkroom in Spence Bay, 1973 Text on paper 28 x 21.7 cm

Selena Tucktoo [Adults and children walking away], 1973 [Adults and children walking away], 1973 Gelatin silver prints Mount: 45.8×30.5 cm

Selena Tucktoo
Spence Bay, 1973
Sariktak Walking Away, 1973
Gelatin silver prints
Mount: 20.4 x 53.5 cm

Selena Tucktoo [Many rocks but little bread], 1973 Gelatin silver print 17.3 x 17.5 cm

Selena Tucktoo [Quvuvuq Poodlat collecting lichen with baby], 1973 Gelatin silver print 17.3 x 24 cm

Selena Tucktoo [Tookie and children playing near shore], 1973 Gelatin silver print 14.1 x 17.3 cm

Theresa Quaqjuaq [Arnauyuq kneeling on rock], 1973 Gelatin silver print 14.8 x 15 cm

Theresa Quaqjuaq
[Marranfl'aq Kootook and Johnny
working in craft house], 1973
[Women working in the craft house], 1973
[Women working in the craft house], 1973
[Women working in the craft house], 1973
Gelatin silver prints
Mount: 50.8 x 40.6 cm

Theresa Quaqjuaq [Koovala Totalik [?] gathering flora], 1973 [Mary Qavavau Napachie gathering flora], 1973 [Arnauyuq gathering flora], 1973 [Miriau[a]etc' gathering flora], 1973 Gelatin silver prints Mount: 50.6 x 40.8 cm

WORKS EXHIBITED

Theresa Quaqjuaq Letter from Theresa Quaqjuaq to Pamela Harris, 1973 Text on paper 20.2 x 16.6 cm

Theresa Quaqjuaq [Outdoor teatime], 1973 Gelatin silver print 15.3 x 15.1 cm

Theresa Quaqjuaq [Pamela Harris], 1973 Gelatin silver print 15.6 x 16.7 cm

Tookie Takolik [Eva Tirtak and pot], 1973 [Pot being heated on the fire], 1973 Mount: 45.8 x 30.5 cm

Tookie Takolik [Four children posing], 1973 Gelatin silver print 12.1 x 13 cm Pamela Harris and Unknown Creator Agitation instructions (Inuktitut and English), 1973 Black and white photocopy 28 x 21.5 cm

Unknown Creator [Introductory wall panel from Women's Darkroom Project exhibition], 1974 Text on paper 20.2 x 53.4cm

Unknown Photographer [Women and children in circle], 1973 Gelatin silver print 15.8 x 24 cm

Various Photographers
Sheet of slides by multiple Darkroom
Project photographers, 1973
20 colour slides
5 x 5 cm each

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Exhibition and Publication of Photographs class of 2017 would like to thank the Ryerson Image Centre, Ryerson University's School of Image Arts and the Art Gallery of Ontario for their generous financial support. We also owe special thanks to the following individuals for their contributions: Marta Braun and Paul Roth for their sponsorship; Chantal Wilson, Erin Warner, Eric Glavin, Valérie Matteau, Jennifer Park and Sara Angelucci at the Ryerson Image Centre for their advice and support; Mike Tieber at RR Donnelley for his technical expertise; Wanda Nanibush, Amy Furness, Marilyn Nazar, Katharine Whitman at the Art Gallery of Ontario for their intellectual support; Selena Tucktoo for her time and words; James Eetoolook; Katherine Minich; Shannon Anderson; The Toronto Inuit Association; Pamela Harris for her time and participation; and finally Sophie Hackett and Gaëlle Morel for their much appreciated leadership and guidance.

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PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS

All photographs and ephemera in the publication are from the collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

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(front and back cover)

Pamela Harris [Contact sheets 32 and 33], 1973 Gelatin silver prints each 20.3 x 25.4 cm (page 1)

Pamela Harris Tookie Photographing Pam, Arctic Women's Craft Conference, Toronto, 1974 Gelatin silver print 15.3 x 19.3 cm (page 27)

Tookie Takolik [Four children posing], 1973 Gelatin silver print 12.1 x 13 cm



Theresa Quaqjuaq Pamela with Theresa's Children, 1973 Gelatin silver print 15.6 x 16.7 cm

