

Event_Cognizance.

The Spatial Dimension of Iñupiaq Spirituality: Architecture as a Medium of
Understanding a Buried Identity

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Abstract

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As designers, we are trained to take the existing and better it. It is our obligation to ourselves, our mentors, and to past, present, and future societies. Over the course of our training, we develop sacred rituals of interpretation and production of what we know to be tangible architecture. The methods we choose to determine how we physically occupy space become ceremonial.

Often, because of these established routines, the events that compose what it means to dwell in these spaces is overshadowed by the assigned program. These events take on their own spatial dimension separate from the visible physical form.

This thesis explores the multi-faceted characteristics generated by the impalpable dimension of event architecture in the context of pre-protestant Iñupiaq spirituality.



Acknowledgements

To my thesis advisors Vikram Prakash, Dr. Bob Mugerauer, and Nicole Huber for showing me that sometimes what we're searching for awaits outside of our comfort zone.

To Lori & Pat Henry for being such gracious hosts and making my visit to Kikiktagruik not only possible but also unforgettable.

To my family for all of their unwavering support of my architectural pursuits for the past 20 years. It really does take a village.

To Kumak, my Auntie Deb Billingsley, for being a role model Iñupiat woman and your efforts to keep the stories of our ancestors alive

Quyagikpin il̄isautikap̄ḡa.

Contents

08	Aanayaanajaiq : To Become Aware
10	Iñuu : To Live, To Dwell
12	Nalautit : To Occur (An Event)
14	Kanjiq : Origin
	Arctic Peoples
	Region of Kikiktagruik
	Traditional Iñupiat Lifestyle
	Traditional Iñupiat Spiritual Beliefs
	Effects of European Contact
	Modern Interpretation
	Lineage
	Inuit Print Style
34	Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story
56	Agiusaaq : Conclusion of an Event



Aanayaanaiq : To Become Aware

To fully understand how to dwell within architecture, we must first acknowledge that architecture is not just about the tangible. It has a dimension which is mapped out in our memories, diagrammed through our stories, and understood in our beliefs. There is an entire impalpable spatial realm that is as familiar to us as the physical buildings we inhabit. It is a part of us. We live within this realm and, more often than not, we don't even realize it.

To the pre-Protestant Iñupiat peoples of northwest Alaska, spirituality and environment were connected with such intricacy that one could not exist without the other. To the Inupiat, everything has a soul and the entire cosmos is a culmination of the complex interactions and cycling of those souls (Turner 76). The Iñupiat elders passed down the knowledge of these dynamic cosmic relationships to children through story telling who would employ their lessons throughout a lifetime and, in turn, pass them down to their own children and grandchildren.

Around the 1880's, European missionaries began expeditions into the arctic region and with them came the influence of Protestantism. Iñupiat spiritual practices were frowned upon and an increasing amount of natives began to convert. Criminalization of these shamanic practices became common place. Traditional Iñupiat Spirituality was gradually lost with the deaths of elders resulting in a significant disconnect and loss of identity in contemporary generations. Stories have been left untold.

I am an Iñupiat woman, a part of this conflicted generation, and I am also a formally trained architectural designer. My understanding of architecture, until this point, has been developed through the lens of a western world view and my understanding of Iñupiat culture has been through the lens of my mothers stories in my home state of Florida. I chose to do this thesis as a means of learning to dwell within the context of my own buried ancestral tradition.



Iñuu : To Live, To Dwell

For every built architecture project, there is a critical transitioning moment when lines on paper and drywall on wood frame become a dwelling. There is no streamlined concrete way to record or measure this moment, but eventually, we are aware of its occurrence. It is part of what makes us conscious beings and transforms structures into spatial experiences. Heidegger, aware of how defining of a moment this is writes “Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then we can build.”

“More important, rather, is listening and hearkening. We need to rediscover who we really are. Also, we must continue to act in ways that hold the world together as best we can in accordance with our present way of thinking. Such action, however, only addresses itself to the symptoms of the underlying disease that can be treated only by taking a step back from our current identity.” (Seamon and Mugerauer)

Learning how to dwell is not a skill simply taught in architecture school or practice. We are given the necessary tools to discover it, but the discovery has to be on our own accord, using our own processes. There are standardized methods and approaches to building in professional practice that exist because they have had success, however, it is only when the designer has established their own unique understanding of what it means to dwell that architecture can be created.



Fig. 04. Tschumi, Bernard. "Parc de la Villett". *Event Cities 2*.

Nalautit : To Occur (An Event)

Architecture is not just the skill of designing structures, but understanding experiences. Event architecture is the architecture of interactions, stories, and people independent of a specific site. It's not an object in the second or third dimension, but experiences, emotions, and occurrences that happen only in the fourth dimension. Often, we perceive a successful design as one that accommodates practical constraints such as budget, location, and program. Our efforts to understand the intangible components of space are diluted by industry standards if they are even present at all. In *Event Cities*, Bernard Tschumi writes "Static notions of form and function long favored by architectural discourse need to be replaced by attention to the actions that occur inside and around buildings – to the movement of bodies, to activities, to aspirations. The properly social and political dimension of architecture. Programmatic dimension becomes as much a part of their architecture as of their use. Architecture is as much about the events that take place in spaces as about the spaces themselves".

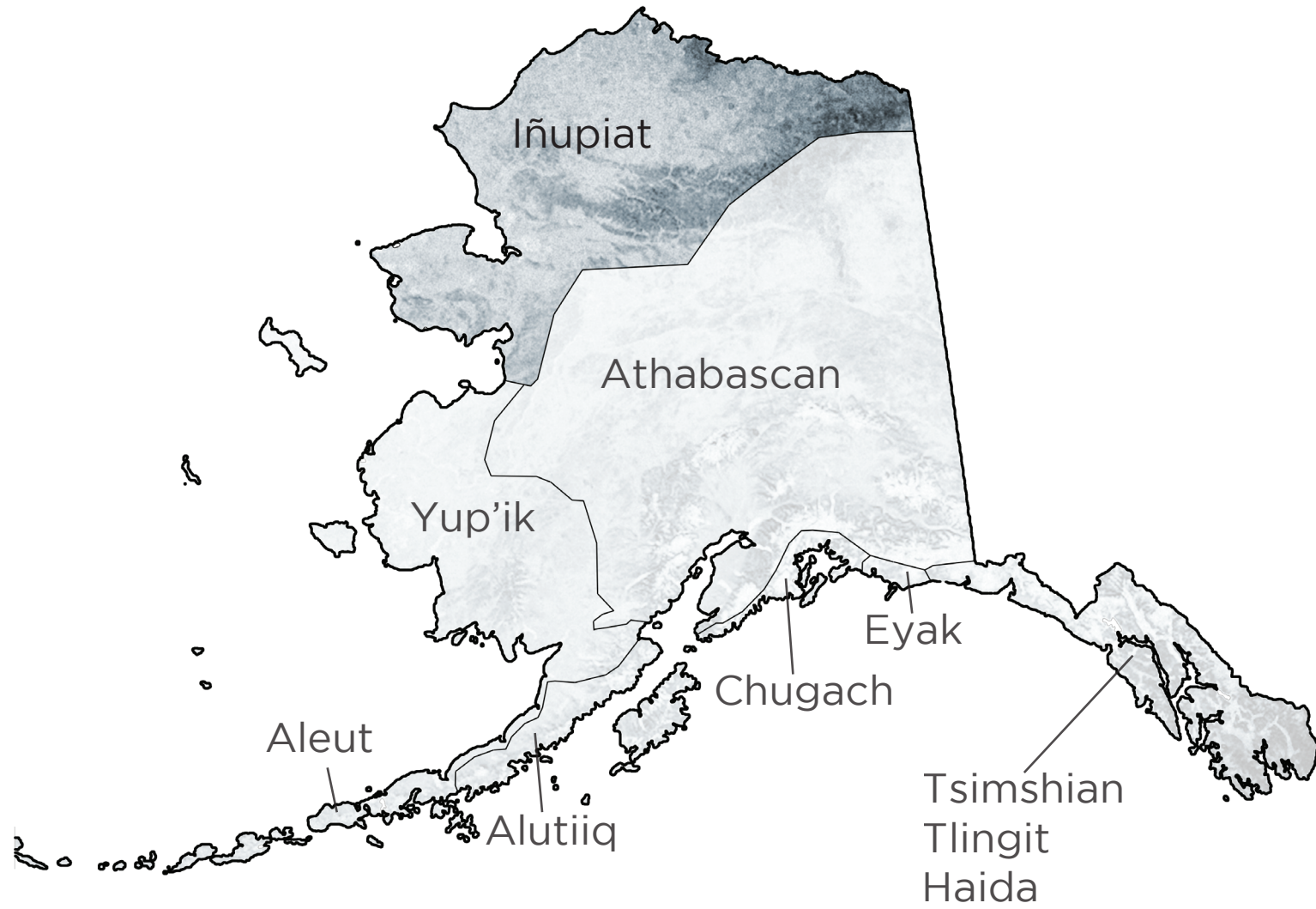
Without an understanding of these events, we are merely assembling buildings instead of creating architecture. The structure is the body and the events which happen in and around it are the soul. Together, they come alive as architecture.



Fig. 05. Map of Inuit regions of U.S.A., Canada, and Greenland

Kanjiq : Origin

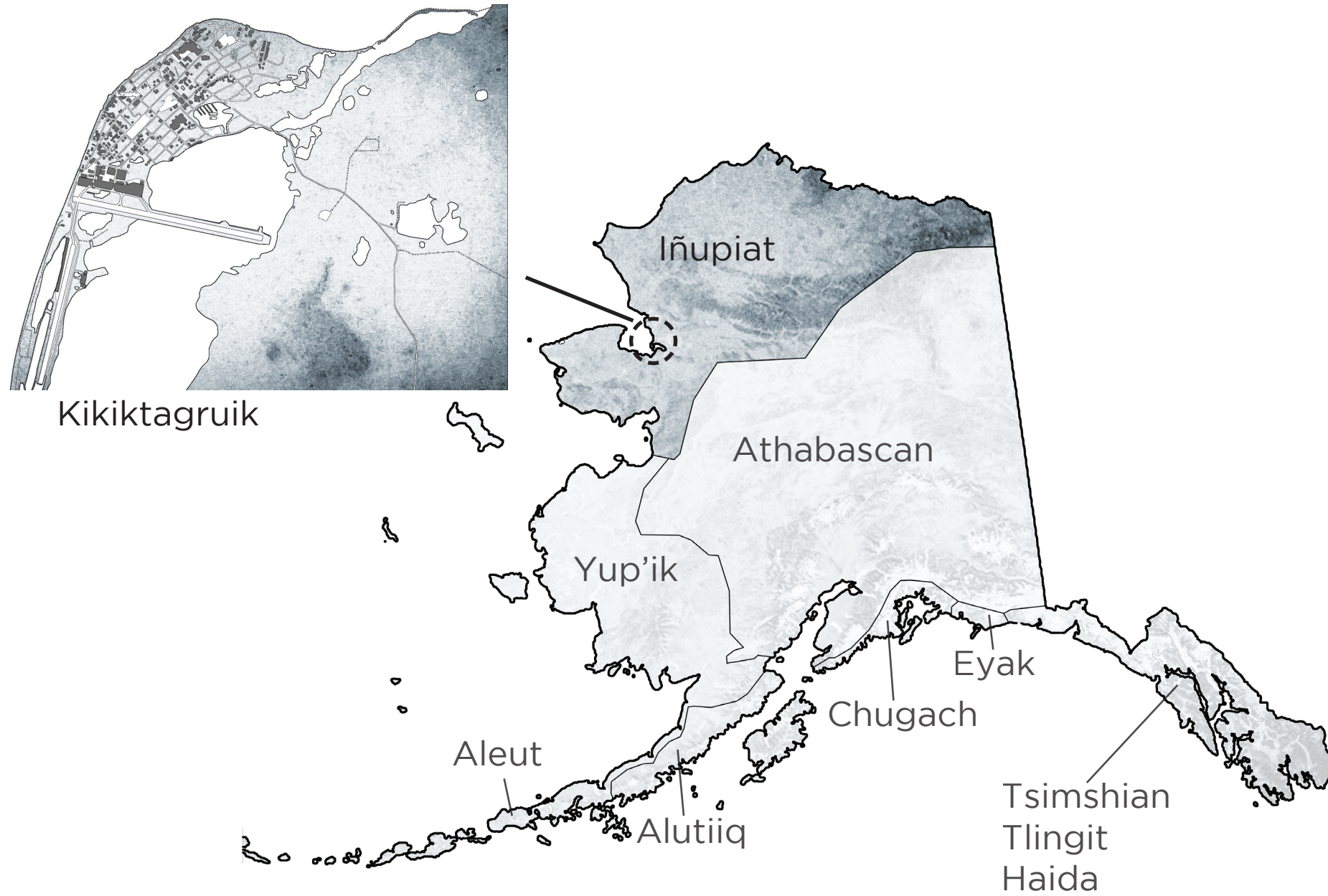
Descendants of the Thule culture of western Alaska, the Inuit peoples have inhabited the arctic regions of North America and Greenland since approximately 1000 CE (citation needed). Not to be confused with the Sami peoples of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and western Russia, Inuit is a generalized term used to broadly describe the indigenous tribes who have historically populated the northern regions of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and occasionally Denmark or eastern Russia. Unlike their Dorset predecessors, the Inuit relied heavily on the assistance of dog teams to navigate the land, umiaks (sealskin boats) to hunt whale, as well as bows and arrows to hunt land animals (Diamond 256).



Kanjiq : Origin

The state of Alaska is home to several indigenous tribes with differing origins and the terminology used to describe them reflects this. Inuit and Eskimo are not interchangeable and one can be derogatory while the other is preferred depending on the country (Kaplan). For example, the Yupik peoples do not belong to the Inuit group and prefer the term “Eskimo” while “Eskimo” is considered offensive to Canadian and Greenlandic tribes. Despite this difference in categorization, the Yupik and Iñupiat peoples have cultural and grammatical similarities. The Iñupiat identify as both Inuit and Eskimo.

Fig. 06. (Opposite) Map of Inuit regions of U.S.A., Canada, and Greenland



Kanjiq : Origin

The focus of this thesis will be on the Iñupiat peoples of the Kikiktagruik region of Alaska (commonly known as Kotzebue), which is the homeland of my maternal family. Approximately 30 miles north of the Arctic Circle, the native village of Kikiktagruik is situated on a spit toward the northwest end of the Baldwin Peninsula within the Kotzebue Sound. The Chukchi Sea is to the west of the Kotzebue Sound and the Hotham Inlet borders to the east.

Since Kikiktagruik is bordered by water bodies in both directions, the Iñupiat peoples of this region developed a strong relationship with the sea and subsisted off of fish, seal, walrus, and most importantly whale. Taremiut is the anthropological term used to describe coastal Inupiat peoples and differentiate them from the Nunamiut, or inland Inupiat (Brown 8). Bowhead whales are a vital resource for the Taremiut Iñupiat and because of this have become a central part of the culture. “Iñupiat knowledgeable in their oral history say the hunt reaches back many thousands of

years, deep into time immemorial. Scientists say it has been going on for more than two thousand years. With the body-warming energy and high vitamin C content of its maktak (the thick, black skin and the attached layer of oily blubber), the nutrition in its meat and internal organs, the bones that were used to frame sod iglus, the elastic baleen that was woven into fine baskets, and the liver membranes used to cover drums, the bowhead long ago took its place as a central element in the diet, culture, and spiritual well-being of the arctic coast Iñupiat. It is because of the bowhead whale that communities such as Barrow and Point Hope exist at all.” (Hess 2).

Fig. 07. (Opposite) Map locating Kikiktagruik in Alaska



Traditional Inupiat spirituality centers on the belief that everything has a soul and all things that make up the cosmos, tangible and intangible, are interconnected. Unlike the Protestant emphasis on a singular God, the Inupiat did not have a hierarchal figure, but allocated significance to all beings, believing we all have individual roles and responsibilities to accomplish a shared goal of prosperity. Everything in existence has a conscious and therefore, should be treated with respect.

Upon death, the soul of the individual could be reincarnated as an animal or a new infant. “The idea of transference of the souls of the dead into new bodies is well known among the people of Point Hope. In a sense, the event of the naming of the child is regarded as the material occasion of reincarnation, which is regarded as a healthy and desirable event.” (Turner “Rebirth” 69). When a child is named after a deceased relative, the child is believed to be the reincarnated soul of said relative and is treated as such. It is still common

Kanjiq : Origin

in present day to hear adults address their children as “Dad” or “Uncle” if the child carries the same name. “A child of three in one whale-hunter’s family was watched for significant sayings, especially at whaling time, because he was regarded as the reincarnation of his wise uncle Patrick who in turn had gained spiritual powers from his ancestors. ‘Aapa catch whale’, the child announced one day to everyone’s delight, and indeed Aapa, that is, his grandfather, did assist in catching a whale that year. This child, Aaron, was treated with unusual respect, indeed reverence, which did not fade after a new grandchild was born.” (Turner “Rebirth” 69).

On other occasions, souls could be reincarnated for a short time into “helper spirits”, spirits whose form could be an animal or a presence that could only be seen by the individual being assisted. “Many Inupiat still maintain that the deeds of the old masters were genuine, as evidenced by the following account of animal spirits and their reincarnation given by Ernest Frankson of Point Hope. He was discussing his great-

great-grandfather’s animal helper, a giant polar bear. ‘Polar bears grow to a gigantic size, then develop three more pairs of legs to become the ten-legged polar bears called Kinq or Qoqoqiaq. If you have an animal helper, you see it like you see this’ and Ernest picked up the saltshaker on the table.” (Turner “Rebirth” 70).

The idea of reincarnation supports the overarching belief in the dynamic connectedness of the universe. One individual could be expected to have a complex network of memories, perspectives, and experiences given they have lived past lives as human, animal, or an immaterial spirit. This gathered knowledge was thought to have enabled the individual to not only empathize with their environment, but also to sustain it. To the Inupiat, our surroundings are as much a part of us as our own family.



Fig. 09. Village members pulling harpooned whale ashore.

The role of the whale was a vital spiritual component to the Taremiut Iñupiat. Ancient Iñupiat believed that the hunting of all game including whales was a two way process. “The concept of cosmological cycling among the Inupiat is found paradigmatically in the reincarnation of the whale. The whale is the center of life for the people of Point Hope. It is their moral mentor, initiator of spirituality, food, and source of sociality. They do not ‘kill’ it, it comes to them, for the good of the cosmos, and they are therefore enabled to catch it.” (Turner “Rebirth” 75)

Precise rituals were established out of respect for whales and to safeguard that they would return again next season. These rituals would ensure animals were killed ethically and, in return, the hunted animals would give consent to be taken. “Spirituality plays a key role in the Alaskan whaling tradition. A whale will only give itself to a captain and his crew if it knows it will be taken care of’ Nageak says. Before setting off on a hunt, each crew will have cleaned out its underground

Kanjiq : Origin

ice cellars, lining them with fresh clean snow. ‘The whale knows which whaling crew has a nice clean ice cellar for a nice clean resting place.’ “(Mackay 1).

It was believed that the head is the carrier of the soul. Hunters would cut the head off of killed animals and return it to the land or sea, depending on where it originated from (Turner “Rebirth” 76). Due to the massive size of the whale, it was common practice for a hunter to remove a small portion of the whale’s head or bone from the skull and release it back into the ocean before he could consume the meat.

Annual festivals were held to release the souls of the animals killed that season for reincarnation, to thank them, and to prove the village’s worthiness to consume their bodies for survival. Nalukataq, (translating to blanket toss) is an annual whaling festival which originated as a celebration of the success of the whaling crew, an opportunity to redistribute wealth of resources, as well as a tribute for the hunted

whales. “The entire community helps him [A whaling captain or Umalik] land and butcher his bowhead. He does not sell its flesh. Except for that small part he keeps for himself and his immediate family, he gives it away.” (Hess 12).

In a practice out of respect for the whale, elders and orphans were given the first helping of muktuk, followed by those struck by misfortune that year. “The bowheads not only nourish bodies but spirits as well.” (Hess 12). By displaying generosity and selflessness, the village worked to convince the whale community that the perished whale would be used for a good purpose. This was done in hopes that next season the whales would allow themselves to be taken again.



Kanjiq : Origin

The village shaman played a critical role for traditional Inupiat spirituality, ensuring prosperity and wellbeing to the community. Shamans were believed to have capabilities to transcend the physical realm and engage with the intangible on the behalf of his or her tribe. "The shaman was of great assistance to her or his community. (It is possible that in precontact days shamans were often women, one in each family. Hints of this are found in the accounts I have received in which a shaman might be a close woman relative). She or he could heal – sometimes by sucking out harmful intrusions, find lost objects, predict and change the weather, bring animals for the hunters, and revive and speak with the dead. Drumming at that time often bespoke ritual performance on the occasion of some crisis, that is, in 'contingency' ritual, simulated by the need to cope with sickness, bad weather, being lost, hunting needs, and so on." (Turner "Shamans" 5).

Shamans could leave their parka, or body form, and travel within the Tunnuq, a passageway in the fourth dimension, to communicate to overseeing spiritual entities. Tatqiq, the moon man, allowed the shaman to summon land game such as caribou. Sedna was the authoritative woman who controlled marine animals. Both Sedna and Tatqiq worked with Panaa, the woman in the sky who oversees the reincarnation process.

Fig. 10. (Opposite) Medicine man in traditional shamanic mask

Fig. 11. (Opposite) Medicine man healing sick boy from evil spirits

The first Christian missions were established in the arctic in the late nineteenth century and would dramatically change the spiritual demographic of the Iñupiat. “In 1890, when the first missions were established in Alaska north of Bering Strait, not a single Native in the region was a Christian. By 1910 Christianity was nearly universal. The foundation for this dramatic development was laid in Kotzebue Sound between 1897 and 1902 by Robert and Carrie Samms, of the Friends Church, and by an Iñupiaq Eskimo named Uyaraq, who had been converted earlier by Covenant missionaries located south of the study area.” (Burch, “Christianization” 1).

In September of 2017, I traveled to Kikiktagruik in an effort to employ qualitative research methods for this thesis. Because of the widespread influence of Protestantism, I found it difficult to find written information on pre-contact Iñupiat spirituality. I had the opportunity to experience the landscape firsthand to gain perspective on how the environment could

be an influence to pre-Protestant Iñupiat beliefs as well as seek out the stories of the current native residents. Out of the dozens of people I spoke with, very few disclosed they knew anything about Iñupiat spiritual beliefs outside of Christian influence and those who did know little emphasized it was speculative knowledge that their Aanaa (grandmother) or Taata (grandfather) would acknowledge to one another in private.

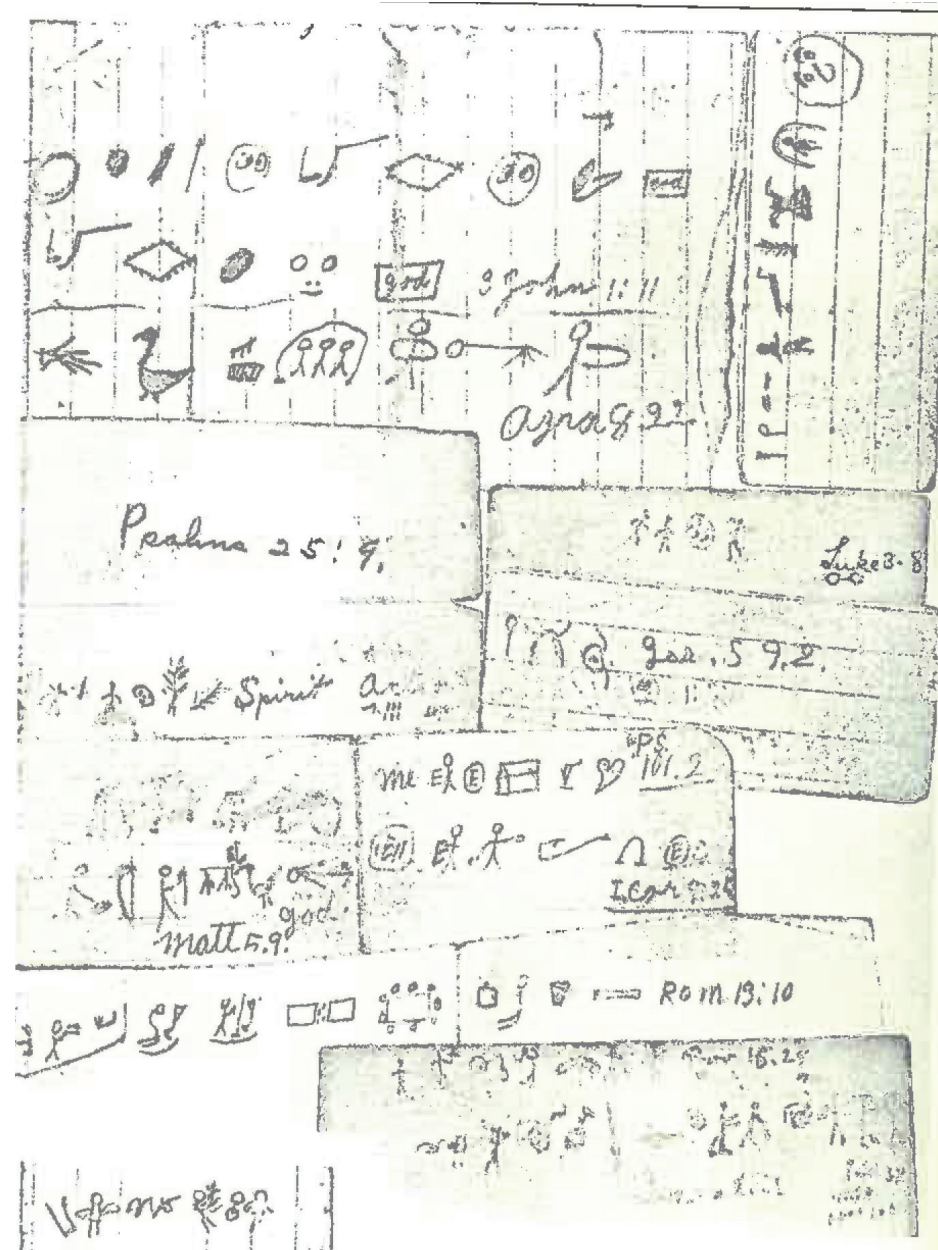
Upon her visit in the 1980’s to Point Hope, anthropologist Edith Turner wrote “The missionaries opposed all manifestations of the old Inupiaq religion and all aspects of the culture that had reference to it. They established the celebrations of the Whites, and at these celebrations Inupiat dances were performed, but only those of social and secular nature. Shamanic performances everywhere were abolished... Inupiaq healing continued, having quietly changed its spirit helpers from shamanic ones to the Christian God”.

Kanjiq : Origin

Today, with modern anthropological research, we know animism and shamanism were certainly components of Iñupiat spirituality, yet most current tribal policies seemingly continue to uphold Iñupiat values in the context of Christianity. The NANA Regional Corporation was created under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 and operates with the intent of enhancing the wellbeing of the Iñupiat people, providing opportunities for economic growth, and upholding traditional values and culture. The NANA Corporation organizes its core company philosophy under the “Iñupiat Ilitqusiatic” mission. “The name means ‘Iñupiat Spirit,’ or ‘those things that make us who we are.’ ‘The Spirit Movement’ is firmly rooted in the history of the region. The Iñupiat know the land is their home and the movement formalized the deep spiritual connection they have to the land and all it provides.” (NANA). The Iñupiat Ilitqusiatic states “Our understanding of the universe and our place in it is a belief in God and a respect for all of His creation” (NANA), but the Protestant understanding of God is a moderately new

concept to the Iñupiat, and has only been in the Kikiktagruik region for less than 130 years.

While the “Iñupiat Ilitqusiatic” is well intended and has had some positive influence since its creation in 1971, in the years that have followed the first Iñupiat peoples in Alaska of 1000 B.C.E., approximately 4% have been aware of the Protestant belief in God, less than that have been followers. Although this thesis does not argue that Christianity has not been, in some sense, part of the modern Iñupiat identity, it is clarifying that, when compared to the history of Iñupiat beliefs since their separation from the Thule culture, Christianity has been involved for a minuscule portion of that time. There is more to our spirituality than Protestantism that makes us who we are.



Kanjiq : Origin

Growing up in Loxahatchee, Florida, I have only known Iñupiat culture through the stories of my mother, who was born in Kikiktagruik. A part of the baby boomer generation, her understanding of Iñupiat identity is intertwined with western Protestant influence. Her stories, while still retaining the traditional subsistence values and respect for nature, are often combined with memories of punishment for native practices such as speaking Iñupiaq in school. There are approximately 2,000 fluent speakers and it is classified as a threatened language by the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Krauss 408).

Pre-European contact, my predecessors learned of our history and culture through stories of our elders without stigma. For my generation, we must fill in the blanks with the assistance of photographs, writings and artifacts.

Before written language was introduced to the arctic region, my great great grandfather, Ezra Booth, used picture writing as a technique to describe what he was hearing, seeing, and experiencing. Figure (FIGURE NUMBER) is an excerpt from the book *Tomorrow is Growing Old*, in which members of Kikiktagruik's Friends Church, the same church Ezra Booth attended, used symbols and images to tell stories they were taught of biblical events by Christian missionaries (Roberts 535). Through this method, my great great grandfather was learning to dwell in both his traditional world and the one imposed on him by writing, thinking, and drawing.

Fig. 12. (Opposite) Iñupiat picture writings

Fig. 13. (Opposite Top) My grandmother and mother on Kikiktagruik beach

Fig. 14. (Opposite Bottom) My mother and I on Kikiktagruik beach



Kanjiq : Origin

Printmaking, a modern method in which traditional stories and activities could be described, was introduced to the arctic around the late 1950's and, much like early picture writing, continues to be a valued tool used to document experiences. The Inuit prints of Cape Dorset, Canada are possibly some of the most recognized works, however, printmaking has also been a graphic medium utilized by the Iñupiat of Alaska. Inuit prints are characterized by exaggerated movements, facial expressions, and minimalistic contrast between the ink and the canvas on which it is applied.

Inuit prints have become a means to record certain memories and events. It is an illustrative approach to written record. In Figure 1, Helen Kelvak appears to be explaining a role of a matriarch to pass down her technique of plucking a game bird to young women. There is reference to homemaking with a hide tent in the scene as well as infants or young children present. Kelvak, despite the Inuit printmaking technique of minimalist-like silhouettes, is able to give the viewer a sense

of the arctic environment as well as family dynamics.

Figure 2, created by Victor Ekootak, is an example of a print which explains a traditional approach to catching fish. "In this print the artist shows a fishing weir (or trap) of stone that was constructed to catch fish in shallow streams. Men, women, and children would participate in the spearing of the fish with kakivaks, or three-pronged fish spears. The fish would then be dried for future use by hanging them on a line, as shown in the background of the print." (Winnipeg Art Gallery). Similarly to the way Kelvak described traditional activities of food preparation by Inuit women, Ekootak recalls subsistence events that required effort from all members of a family, regardless of age or gender.

Fig. 15. (Opposite) Kelvak, Helen.
"Plucking the duck".

Fig. 16. (Opposite) Ekootak, Victor.
"River Fishing".



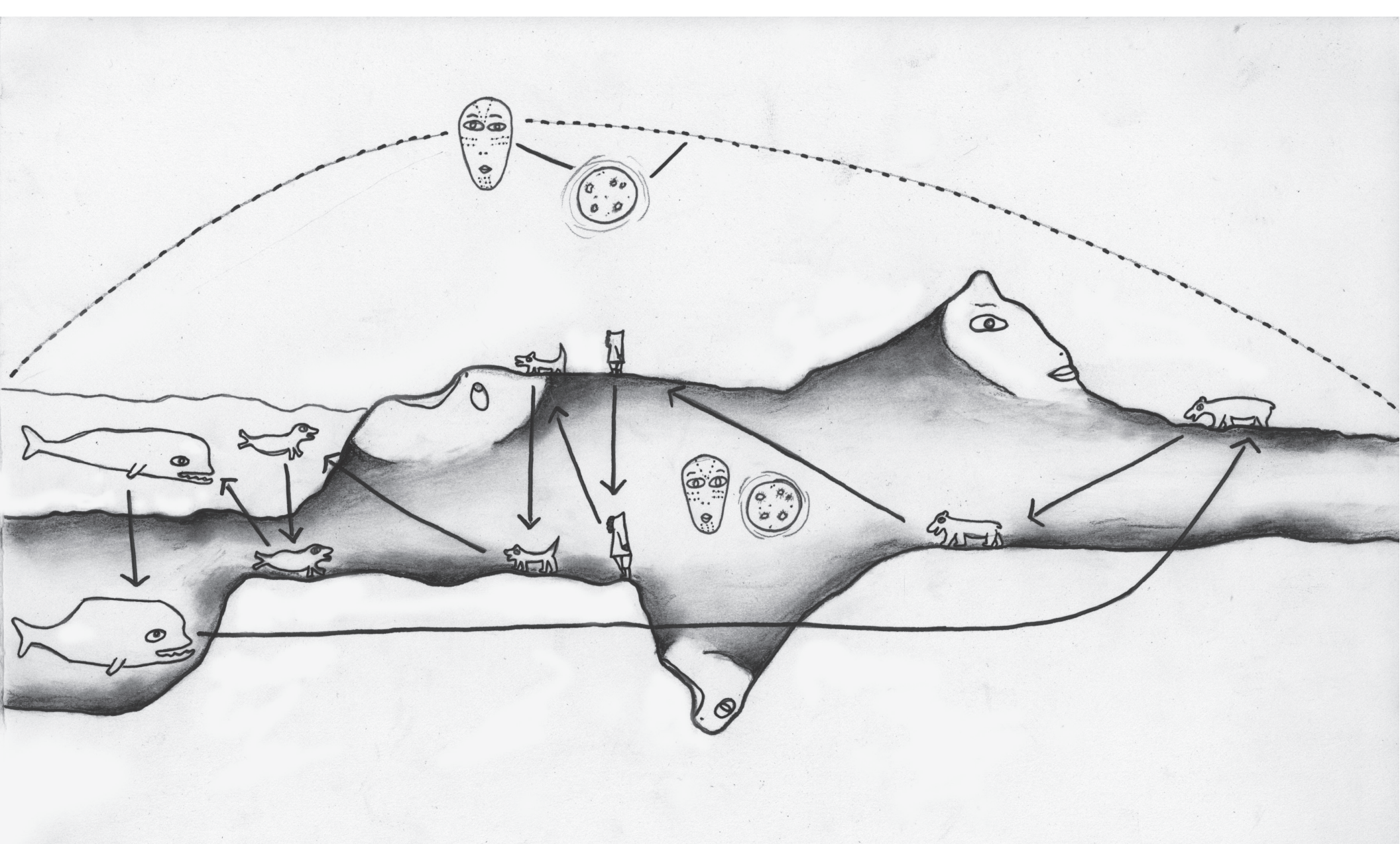
Kanjiq : Origin

While some Inuit Prints focus on the significance of subsistence techniques, others attempt to elaborate on their recollections of spiritual events. Kiakshuk, born in 1886, was part of the last generations who openly practiced pre-contact Inuit shamanism and is reflected in his work in Figure 3. “Kiakshuk’s art springs from his life as a respected hunter and shaman. His images are usually rendered in great detail with defined clothing patterns and expressive faces. This print shows the seemingly benign subject of a family traveling on the land, but it also conveys a sense of the many supernatural beings that are part of the shamanic world. The viewer can see the strange creatures that float above and below the human figures, while they stare in alarm but are unable to share in the viewers’ or shaman’s vision.” (Winnipeg Art Gallery).

Fig. 17. (Opposite) Kiakshuk.
“Strange Scene”.

Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story

As a practitioner of architecture, a dweller of event cities, and an Inupiat woman, this thesis focuses on utilizing my background to develop my own method of storytelling. The following chapter is my process of combining my architectural training with the style of Inuit printmaking and my great great grandfather's picture writing to describe the findings of my research on Inupiat spirituality.



Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story

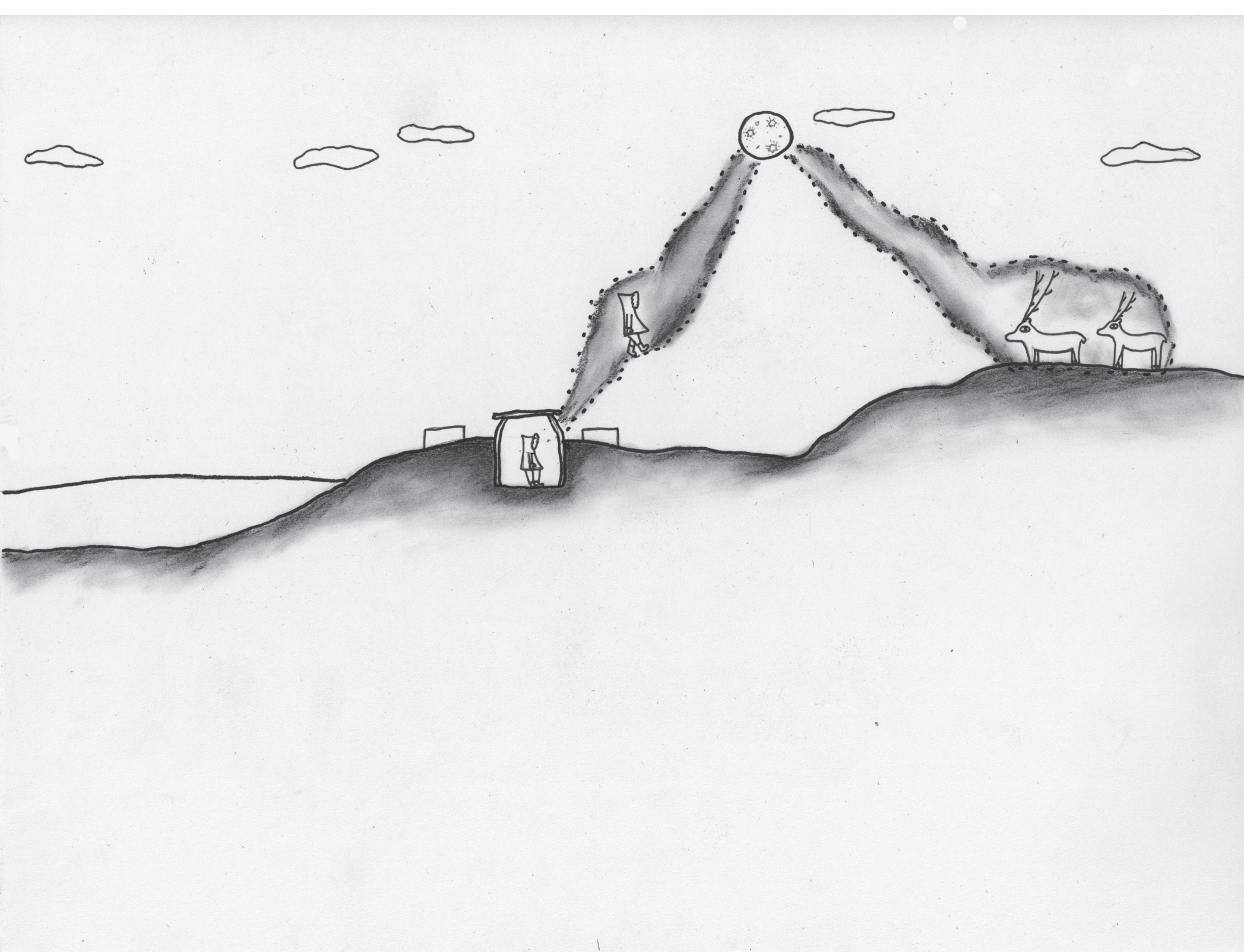
Inua is the Iñupiaq term to describe the spirit of all living things. To the Inupiat, everything, including the landscape, is a conscious being. There is no ultimate death. Panaa is the woman in the sky who over sees the reincarnation process with the help of Tatqiq (the moon man). It is said that when the moon is not present at night it is because hes helping Panaa. The souls of the dead are invited into Panaa's home where she re-introduces them to our tangible world in different forms.

Inua
Spirit of all living things.

Panaa
The woman in the sky; looks after the souls of the dead.
The dead are reborn in Panaa's house and come back to earth in a different form.

Moon
The moon is not visible the nights he is helping Panaa.

Fig. 18. (Opposite) Inua, the spirit of all living things. Charcoal on paper

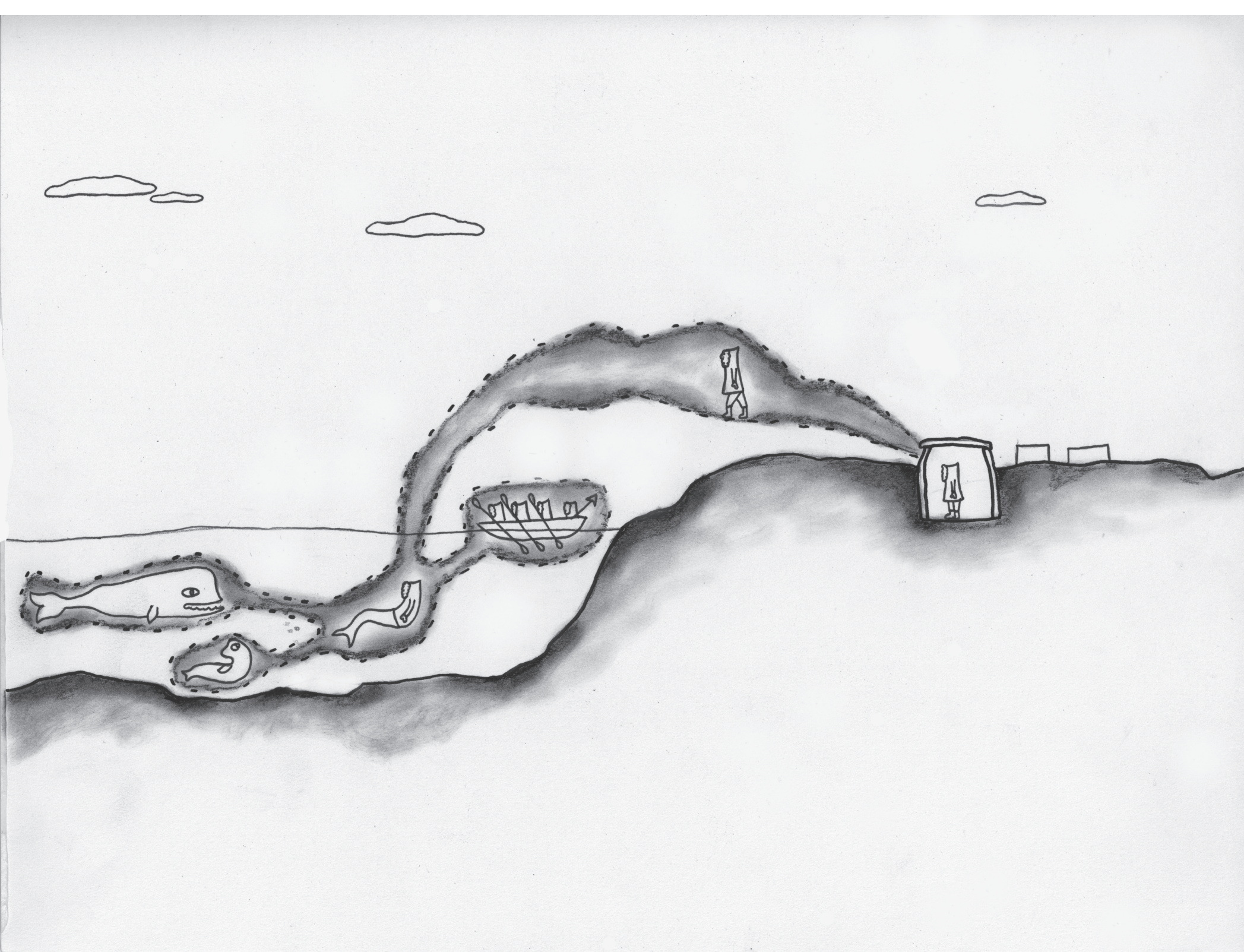


Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story

The village shaman is responsible for communicating to game and convincing them the village is worthy of consuming them. To do this, he or she meditates to leave their 3 dimensional form. They enter the realm of Tunnuaq in order to travel to Tatqiq, the moon man. Tatqiq can reach out directly to the game and informs them if the village is respectable enough to allow themselves to be taken.

If an animal has recently been killed unethically, or certain rituals to release its spirit were not performed, Tatqiq will warn others to stay away from that village. The shamans role is to oversee that all village members are respectful of the land and animals so that he or she will not have difficulty convincing Tatqiq of their goodwill and they will have enough food to survive.

Fig. 19. (Opposite) Shaman journeys to Tatqiq. Charcoal on paper.



Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story

The shaman also travels within the Tunnuaq to communicate to Sedna who dwells under the sea and protects marine life. Similarly to the meeting with Tatqiq, the shaman will meditate until his spirit leaves his body. The Tunnuaq is not limited by physical boundaries and opens passages to the land, sky, and sea.

The shaman relays messages of the compassionate practices of the village to Sedna. If she determines the whales, seals, and fish will be killed and consumed humanely, she will inform them it is okay to give themselves to the fisherman and whaling crews.

Inupiat hunters require a strong sense of self-agency in conjunction with the instruction of the shaman throughout the year if they are to be successful during hunting seasons.

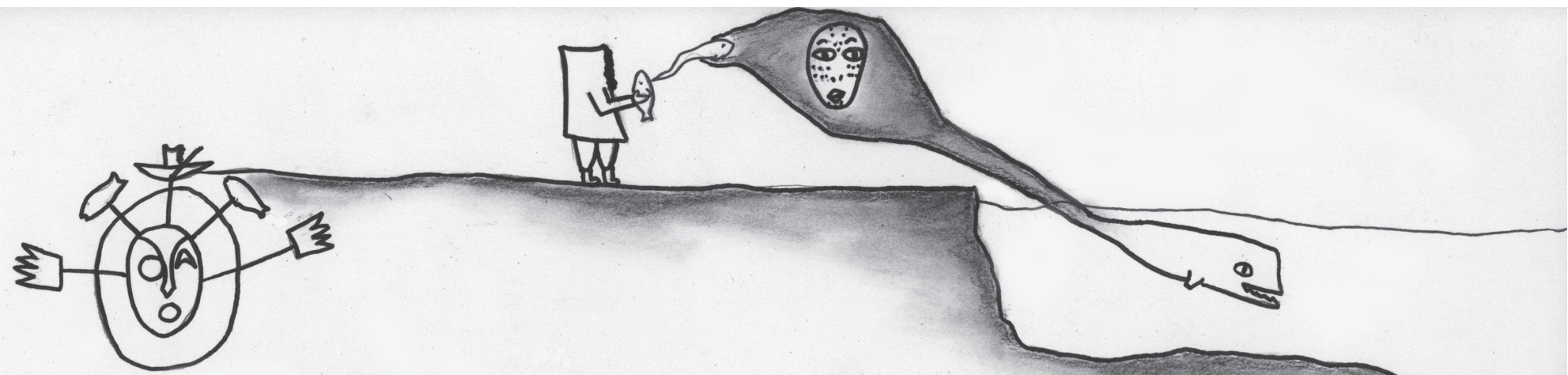
Fig. 20. (Opposite) Shaman journeys to Sedna. Charcoal on paper.



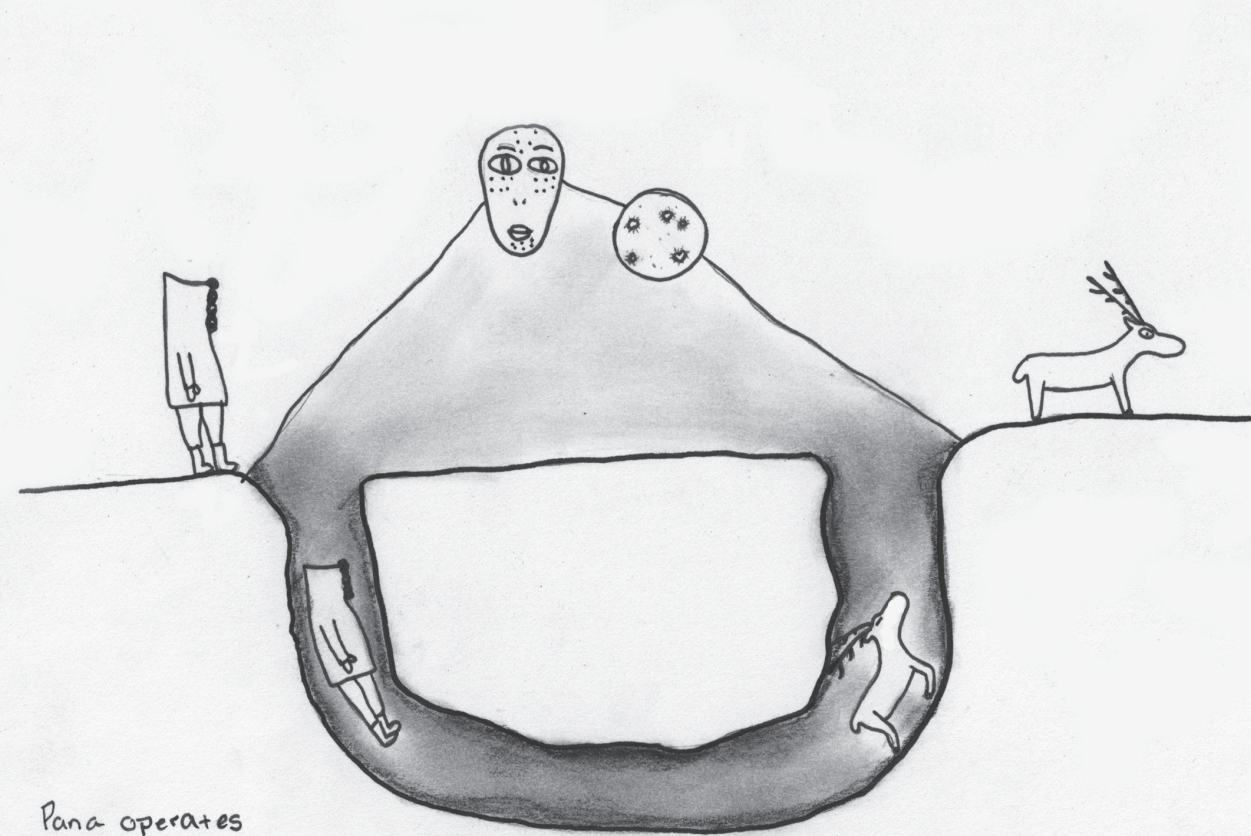
Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story

Shamans also have the capability to communicate directly to the animals when not in the context of hunting. He or she opens the Tunnuaq, shapeshifts into a seal for example, and is allowed to enter the house of the seals. Iñupiat believe all living entities have humanlike characteristics which is evident in the belief that when seals enter their home, they hang up their seal parkas (skin) and return to human form.

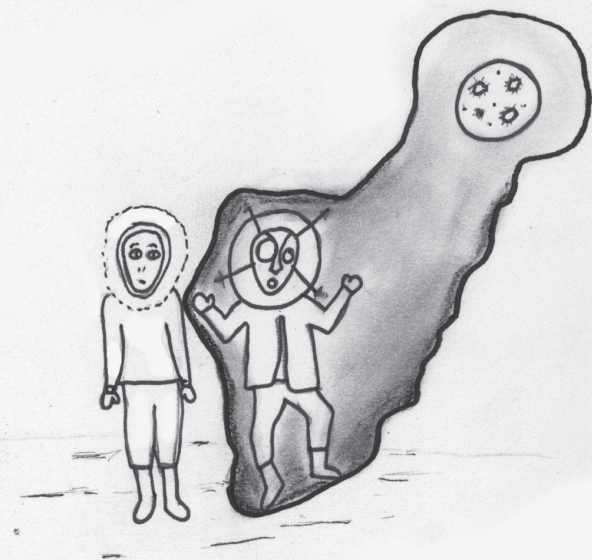
Fig. 21. (Opposite) Seals hang up their parkas. Charcoal on paper.



Ritual masks tell stories and convey messages.
 Hands symbolize the hunters' willingness to release the spirit of the hunted.



Pana operates
 the spatial dimension
 of rebirth.



The mask enables Shaman
 to occupy the Uyumiq dimension
 to communicate with the Moon.

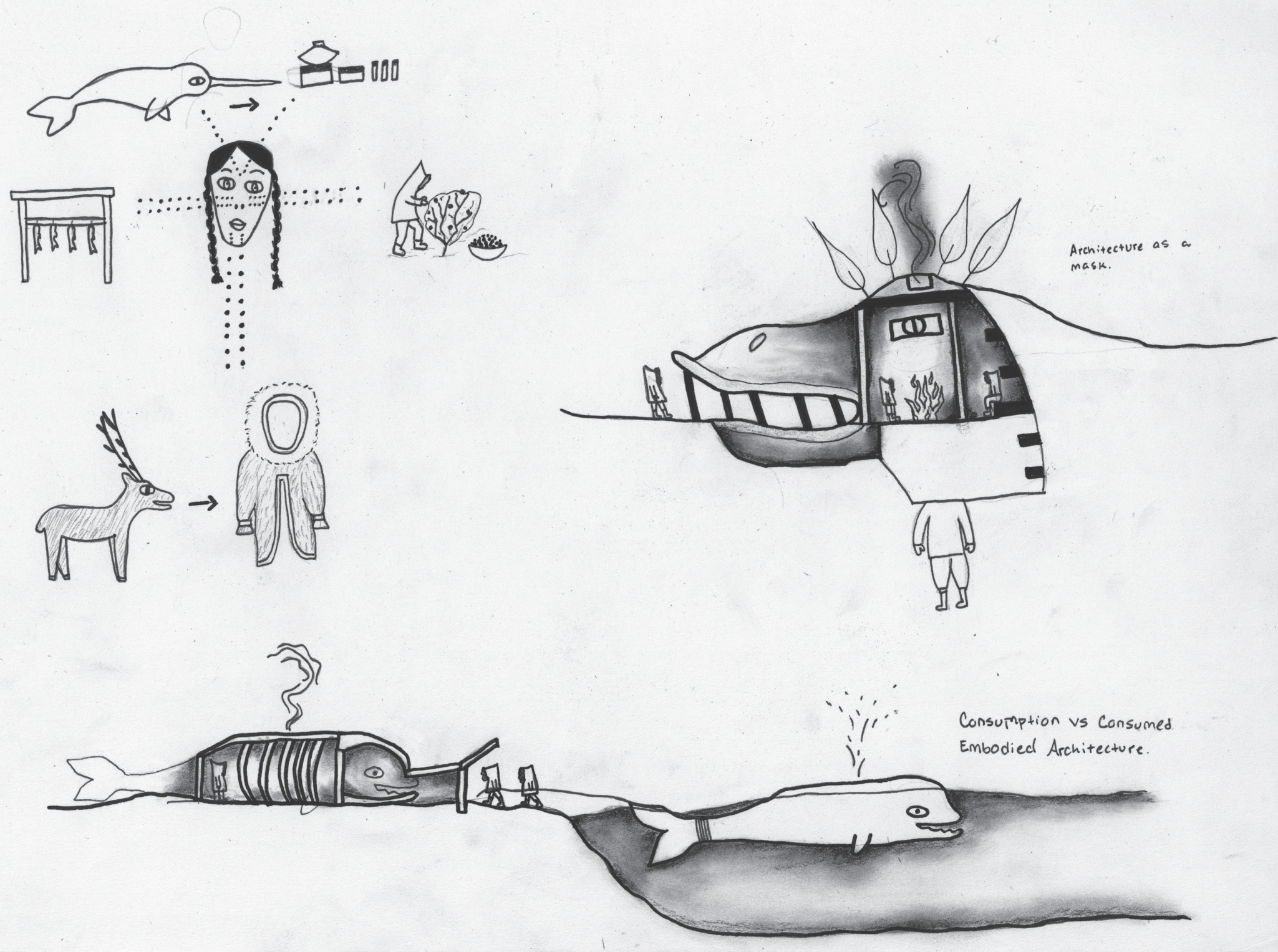
Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story

Masks were a method of communicating to spirits and the way they were crafted directly correlates to the message they convey. For example, masks with hands signify the wearer's willingness to go through the ceremonial process of releasing spirits of game to be reincarnated. When combined with marine elements such as boats or fish, they are explaining to the fish themselves that extra measures will be taken to release the fish to Panaa.

The reincarnation house of Panaa is not visible to the living, yet is as much a part of the physical realm as the landscape itself. Panaa's home is not an isolated dimension. It exists on the same terrain as the realm of the living, but you are only able to experience it after death.

Shamans often used masks in partnership with dance to communicate to entities like Tatqiq. Although their physical location might be the same as a non-shamanic person, only the mask wearer holds the capabilities to conjure the attention of spirits and communicate requests or information.

Fig. 22. (Opposite) Masks and reincarnation. Charcoal on paper.



Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story

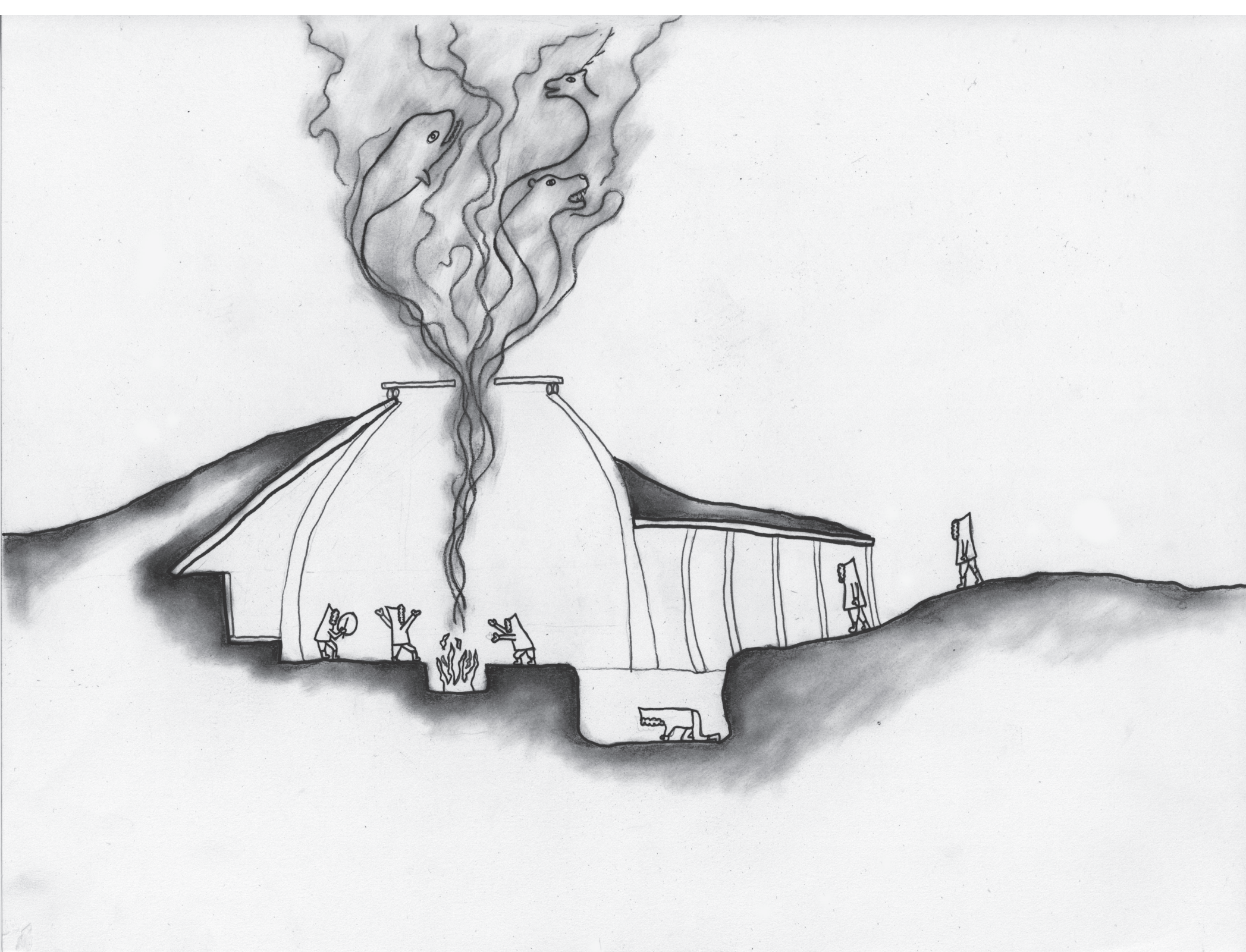
For women to wear an Iñupiat tattoo, they must first earn it. Facial tattoos were a coming of age ritual and only given to young women once they had mastered specific skill sets. Learning how to cut muktuk from a whale, dry fish, sew a parka from raw hide, and efficiently berry pick were a few homemaking tasks that adult women taught young girls. The girls would spend their adolescent years practicing and perfecting these activities until the family matriarch would determine they were ready. Only women who had tattoos themselves were allowed to tattoo the faces of the girls. The traditional tattooing process began with dipping caribou sinew (tendon) into lampblack (soot) and skillfully sewing it into the skin to form precise patterns. The tattoo signified the transition from child to adult and that a woman was qualified to lead a family of her own.

Wearing certain masks transformed the form of the body as well as the mind. The mask wearer took on the shape of the spiritual entity that the mask was created to evoke but

also had the ability to adopt its mentality. Some would use masks as a means of gaining supernatural powers such as clairvoyance.

Part of living a subsistence lifestyle is acknowledging the intricate connectedness of humans and animals. With the exception of a small part of the whale's skull that is released back to the sea, every part of the whale's body is accounted for and fulfills a purpose. The muktuk is consumed by a village for months while the bones are used for framing structures. The Iñupiat understand that the whale's body will continue to encompass them with shelter and nourishment so every part of the hunting and butchering process is performed ethically and respectfully.

Fig. 23. (Opposite) Tattooing and consumption. Charcoal on paper.

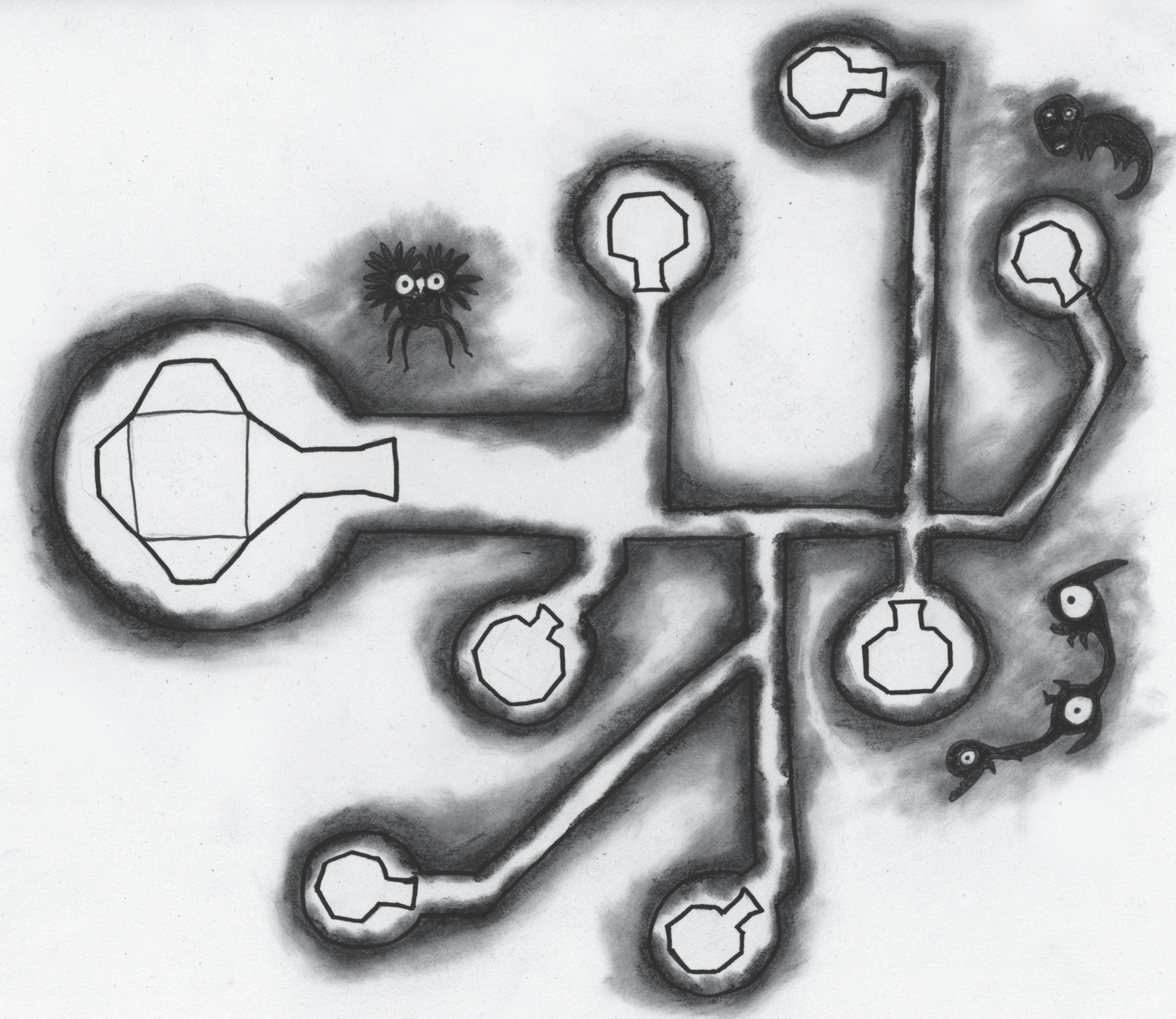


Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story

Inside a whale bone qargi, festival a dance takes place to thank and release the spirits of captured animals. Along with releasing the head, or parts of the head, back into the animals habitat, drum dances around a fire are performed as a farewell and final thank you to the spirits for helping sustain the village.

The qargi, or communal house, had a recessed pit at the entrance, requiring occupants to crawl on all fours before being allowed to access the main room. To crawl on all fours was a humbling experience. It served as s reminder that human form is only temporary, and you are likely to one day be reincarnated as the animals that you hunt.

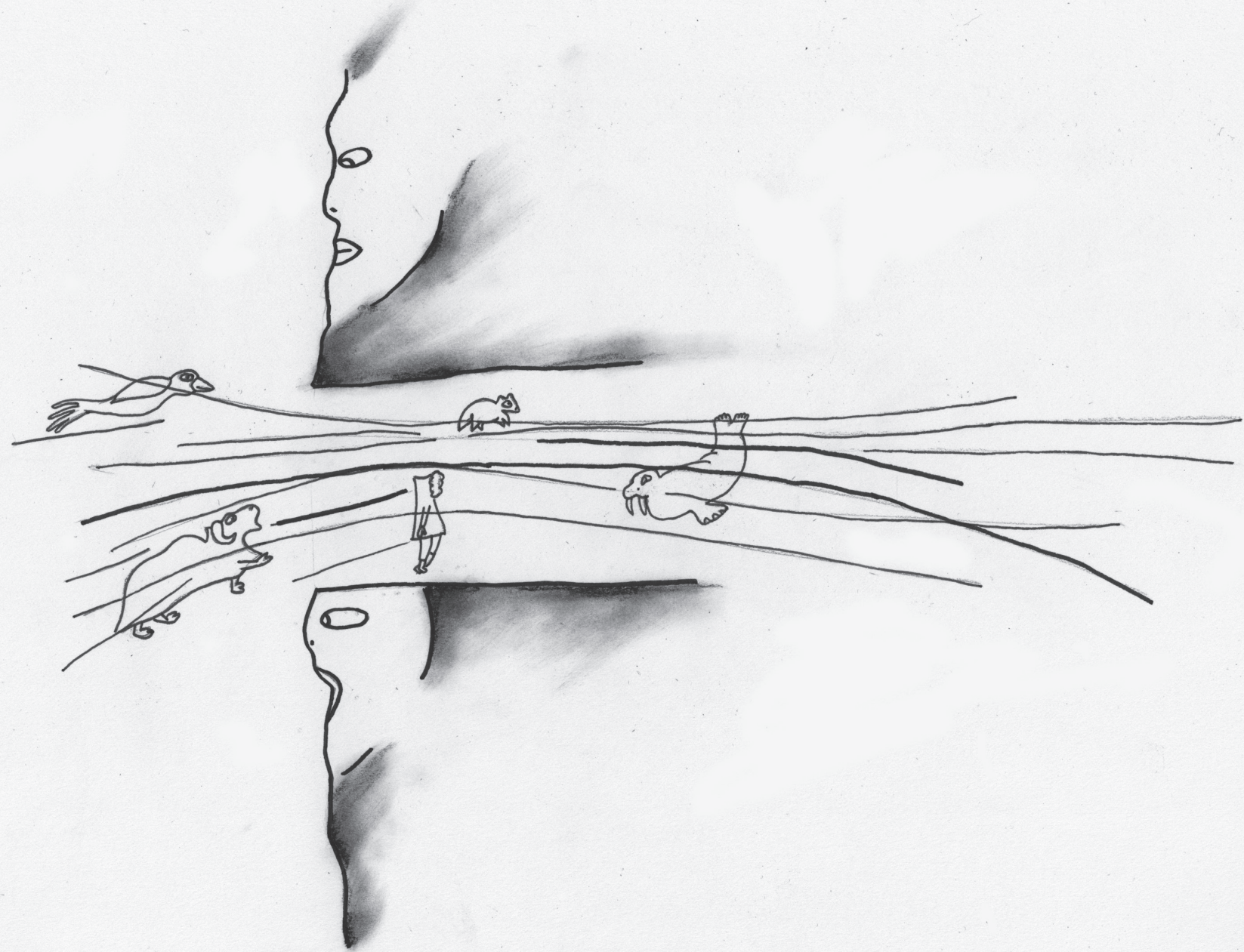
Fig. 24. (Opposite) Releasing animal spirits. Charcoal on paper.



Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story

Lampblack (soot) was highly valued as Shamans would use it to draw lines surrounding dwellings which would ward off malicious spirits. These spirits lived in the darkness and were active at night. The lampblack, when laid by a shaman, was an impenetrable barrier to those that intended to harm the inhabitants but also served as a reminder to villagers to stay close to their families in the winter months. This reduced the amount of disappearances due to wandering too far in the harsh weather conditions and reinforced communal indoor social activities.

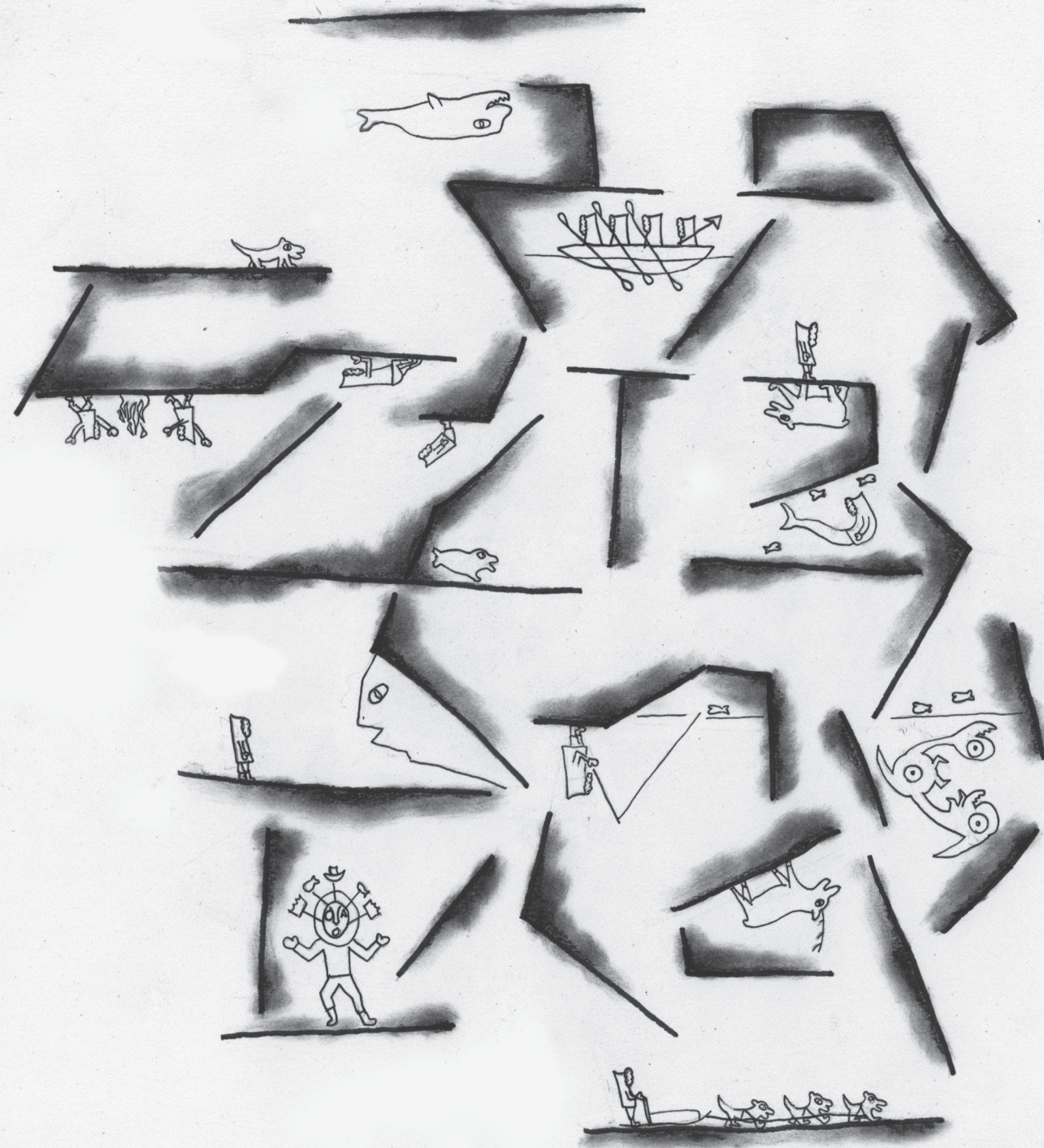
Fig. 25. (Opposite) Protective lampblack. Charcoal on paper.



Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story

The Iñupiat share a cosmological belief that everything, including elements as inanimate as cliff edges, wind, or rivers are alive, powerful, and are to be respected. Careless or destructive behaviors could upset these entities, causing them to retaliate out of self preservation. Tragic events such as falling off a cliff or drowning was interpreted as a message from the environment that it has been disrespected and would require reformation of activities to accommodate it.

Fig. 26. (Opposite) Cliffs are cognizant. Charcoal on paper.

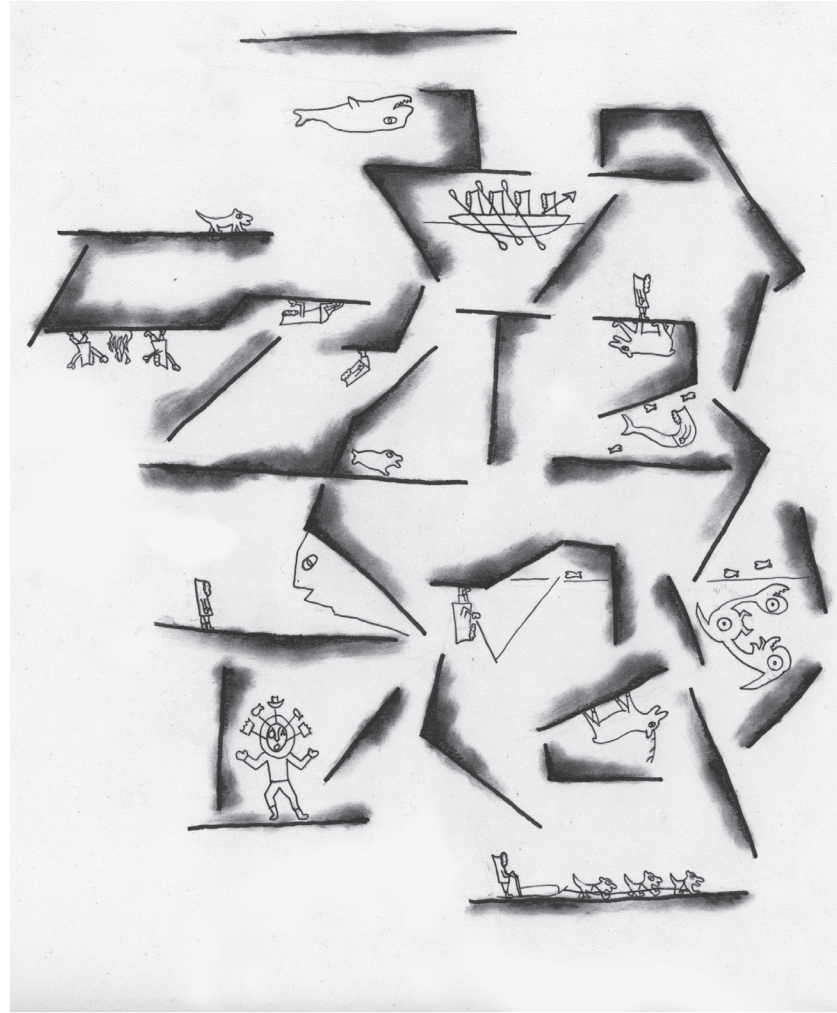
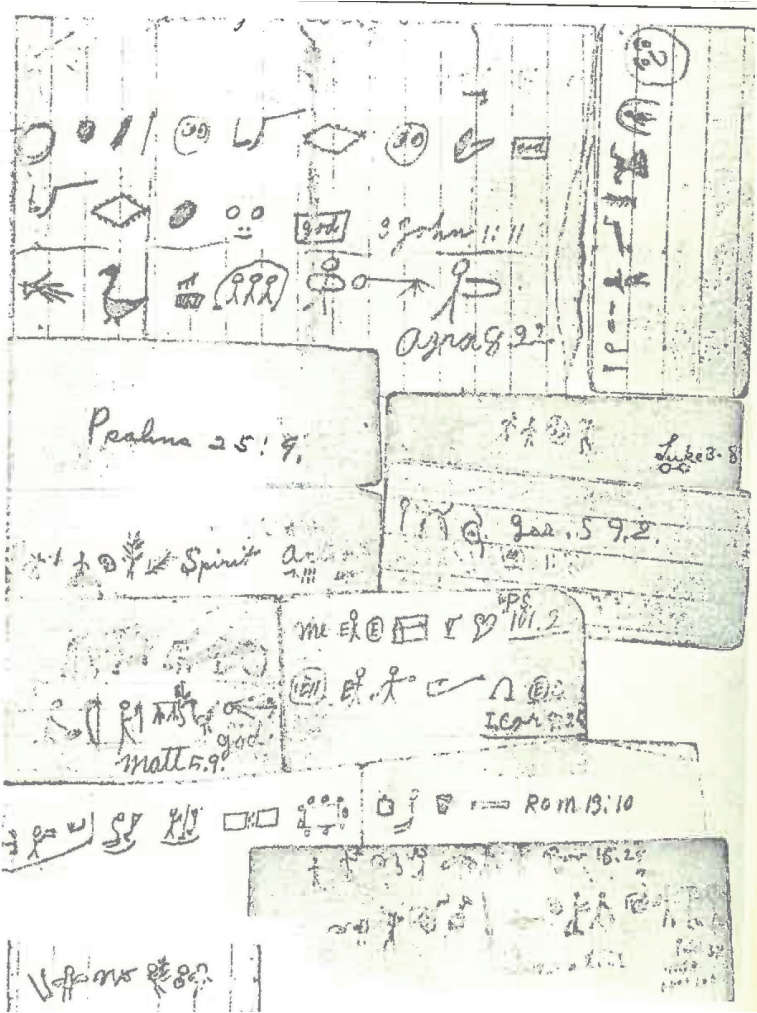


Unipkarrak : To Tell a Story

These diagrams culminate to illustrate this belief that everything in the cosmos is somehow connected. These events happen at different scales, in different dimensions, sometimes simultaneously and may not be tangible, but are still a very real part of event architecture and the way we approach our environment.

This understanding of traditional Iñupiat spirituality emphasizes how critical it is to comprehend what actually takes place in our surroundings. The physical dimension is directly mirrored with the spiritual and to pre-contact Inupiat, one cannot exist without the other. They are the same, not limited by physical boundaries. While the pragmatic constraints existing in architectural practice can not be ignored, we must acknowledge that the events which take place in spaces are equally as necessary to consider.

Fig. 27. (Opposite) The cosmos is connected. Charcoal on paper.



Agiusaaq : Conclusion of an Event

Architecture is alive and its soul is comprised of the social, political, and emotional events associated with it.

My great great grandfathers picture writings are an event, the activities established to survive sustainably are events, the spiritual practices of my ancestors are events.

These event diagrams were my own process of learning to dwell in part of my ancestral tradition and the environment I now live in. They're a necessary process as not only an Iñupiat woman but a future practitioner of architecture in becoming able to design and build.

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List of Figures

*All figures are my own original works unless otherwise noted.

01. Structure for drying fish on beach in Kikiktagruik

02. Path through tundra in Kikiktagruik

03. Present day Kikiktagruik skyline

04. Tschumi, Bernard. “Parc de la Villett”. *Event Cities 2*.

05. Map of Inuit regions of U.S.A., Canada, and Greenland

06. Map of Native Alaskan tribes

07. Map locating Kikiktagruik in Alaska

08. Kikiktagruik beach

09. Philip, Michael. “Starting to Pull Up the First Whale Killed and the Only One So Far This Year”. Alaska’s Digital Archives. May, 1933.

10. Thwaites, John E. “Eskimo Medicine Man. Bering Sea, Alaska.” Alaska’s Digital Archives. 1924

11. Thwaites, John E. “Eskimo Medicine Man, Alaska. Exorcising Evil Spirits From a Sick Boy.” Alaska’s Digital Archives. 1924

12. Roberts, Arthur. “Picture Writings”. *Tomorrow is Growing Old*.

13. My grandmother Rosa Booth with my mom Kathryn Hayes on a beach in Kikiktagruik circa early 1960’s. <http://arcticcircle.uconn.edu/HistoryCulture/Inupiat/growingup.html>

14. My mother and I on a beach in Kikiktagruik. 1994

15. Kelvak, Helen. “Plucking the duck”. Stonecut on paper.1982

16. Ekootak, Victor. “River Fishing”. Stonecut on paper. 1966

17. Kiakshuk. “Strange Scene”. Stonecut on paper. 1964

18. Inua, the spirit of all living things. Charcoal on paper.

19. Shaman journeys to Tatqiq. Charcoal on paper.

20. Shaman journeys to Sedna. Charcoal on paper.

21. Seals hang up their parkas. Charcoal on paper.

22. Masks and reincarnation. Charcoal on paper.

23. Tattooing and consumption. Charcoal on paper.

24. Releasing animal spirits. Charcoal on paper.

25. Protective lampblack. Charcoal on paper.

26. Cliffs are cognizant. Charcoal on paper.

27. The cosmos is connected. Charcoal on paper.

28. Roberts, Arthur. “Picture Writings”. *Tomorrow is Growing Old*.

29. The cosmos is connected. Charcoal on paper.