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Media Release

Artist collective Isuma selects curatorial team for Canada's exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia in 2019



Photo: AJ Messier. Kingulliit Productions.

Ottawa, September 13, 2018 - Isuma, led by Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, has appointed five curators to organize the collective's exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia 2019. The team of five Canadian curators includes Asinnajaq, Catherine Crowston, Barbara Fischer, Candice Hopkins, and Josée Drouin-Brisebois. Isuma, announced as Canada's official entry at the 58th International Art Exhibition in December 2017 by the National Gallery of Canada, was selected by a national committee of experts in contemporary Canadian art.

This is the first time that a team of curators will be working on a project for the Canada Pavilion in Venice. The curators bring multiple strengths to the project: experience curating international

exhibitions including the Venice Biennale (visual arts and architecture) and documenta, background working with northern communities, knowledge of film and media through their own practice as filmmakers or curators, and commitment to publishing.

The curatorial team said in a joint statement, “We are thrilled to work with the Isuma collective – Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn - toward the realization of a new multi-faceted project for Venice. Widely acknowledged as Canada’s foremost artist collaborative who tell stories of colonial-settler relations and contemporary life from an Inuit perspective, Isuma has a long-standing activist ethos of “Thinking for oneself”. The curators are tremendously honoured to further enable this ethos, and to help foster the unique perspective Isuma will contribute as the first artist/artists team based both in the Arctic and Montreal to participate within the international gathering of the Venice Biennale. Working in collaboration with Isuma and the National Gallery of Canada, the curatorial group is mobilizing to work toward a common purpose (pinasuaqatigiinniq).”

Isuma, meaning “to think, or a state of thoughtfulness” in Inuktitut, was co-founded in 1990 as Canada’s first Inuit-owned independent production company. Adapting the tools of experimental video practice to the art of Inuit storytelling, their work has won accolades and awards, and is represented in major art institutions, including the National Gallery of Canada.

La Biennale di Venezia is among the most prestigious contemporary art events in the world, and the only international visual arts exhibition to which Canada sends official representation. Exhibitions for the Venice Biennale are commissioned by the National Gallery of Canada and presented in partnership with the Canada Council for the Arts.

The Canadian representation in 2019 is made possible through the generous financial support of Presenting Sponsor Royal Bank of Canada, and by the many public and private sponsors who have contributed to the National Gallery of Canada Foundation’s fundraising efforts. The 58th Biennale di Venezia will take place from Saturday, May 11 to Sunday, November 24, 2019.

About the curators:

Asinnajaq, is a visual artist, writer and curator, from Inukjuak, Nunavik and based in Montreal. She studied film at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, after working for two summers on a cruise ship in the arctic. Asinnajaq is a co-creator of the Tillutarniit Inuit Film Festival in Montreal. She is the Writer/Director of *Three Thousand* (2017), a film which is in the Winnipeg Art Gallery’s landmark show INSURGENCE/RESURGENCE and is nominated for a Canadian Screen Award. Asinnajaq has been working with Isuma on their retrospective titled *Channel 51: Igloodik* this past year. She looks forward to the continued learning all her posts afford her.

Catherine Crowston is the Executive Director and Chief Curator of the Art Gallery of Alberta. In 2016, Crowston served as the Commissioner for the Canada Pavilion of the Venice Biennale of Architecture featuring landscape architect Pierre Belanger and OPSYS, and was the Canadian Commissioner for the Sydney Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2002. Crowston has held curatorial positions at the Walter Phillips Gallery and the Art Gallery of York University, and was awarded the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts Medal for Outstanding Achievement in

the Visual Arts in 2002. She was inducted into the City of Edmonton Cultural Hall of Fame in 2015.

Josée Drouin-Brisebois is the Senior Curator of Contemporary Art responsible for the collections of Canadian and international Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Canada. She was the Project Director for Geoffrey Farmer's Canadian participation at the 2017 Venice Biennale, and organized the Canadian participation in both the 2013 Venice Biennale art exhibition and the 2011 Venice Biennale. She has curated numerous exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada.

Barbara Fischer is the Executive Director/Chief Curator of the Art Museum at the University of Toronto where she also holds the position of Associate Professor and Director of the Master of Visual Studies Curatorial Studies in the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design. She has held curatorial positions at the Walter Phillips Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, as well as the directorship of the Blackwood Gallery. She curated Mark Lewis for the Canada Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale and was the recipient of the 2008 Hnatyshyn Award for Curatorial Excellence in Contemporary Art.

Candice Hopkins is an independent curator and writer based in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She was a curator for documenta 14 in Athens (Greece) and Kassel (Germany), and has held curatorial positions at the IAIA (Institute of American Indian Arts) Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, Santa Fe; the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; the Western Front, Vancouver; and the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre. In 2014, she received the Joan Lowndes award from the Canada Council for the Arts for excellence in critical and curatorial writing, and in 2016 the Prix pour un essai critique sur l'art contemporain by the Fondation Prince Pierre de Monaco. She is a citizen of Carcross/Tagish First Nation.

Canada's participation at the international art exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia

For more than 60 years, the Canada Pavilion, situated in the Giardini in Venice, has featured the work of the most accomplished Canadian artists, curated by the country's most renowned curators. Canada's representation at the Venice Biennale has played a part in shaping the role and place of Canadian contemporary art within international circles, helping to launch or elevate the international careers of many of the country's most celebrated artists, including Emily Carr, David Milne, Jean Paul Riopelle, Alex Colville, Guido Molinari, Michael Snow, General Idea, Geneviève Cadieux, Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller, Rebecca Belmore, David Altmejd, Shary Boyle, and Geoffrey Farmer.

About Isuma: <http://www.isuma.tv/isuma/bios>

About the National Gallery of Canada: gallery.ca

About the National Gallery of Canada Foundation: ngcfoundation.ca

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