

Darcie Bernhardt is a visual artist from Tuktuuyaqtuq (Tuktoyaktuk), Inuvialuit Settlement Region, NT, based in Halifax, NS. She is a graduate from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Bernhardt's paintings and drawings of domestic spaces share insight on her experiences as an Inuvialuit and Gwich'in woman.

Inuit Art FOUNDATION

Darcie Bernhardt
Nanuk and Jijuu



inuitartfoundation.org

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BELOW
Darcie Bernhardt
(b. 1993 Tuktuuyaqtuq)

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Jijuu Playing Bingo
2018
Oil on canvas
152.4 × 121.9 cm
ALL IMAGES COURTESY
THE ARTIST

COVER
Nanuk and Nanogak
(detail)
2018
Oil on canvas
152.4 × 121.9 cm

INTERIOR
Cutting Caribou
2018
Oil on canvas
121.9 × 71.1 cm



Everything I Want to Hold: Memory and Materiality in the Work of Darcie Bernhardt

Light is central to the work of painter Darcie Bernhardt, whose sun-bleached scenes capture intimate moments both on the land and in the home. “Everybody in the North has experienced 24-hour sunlight,” explains the artist. “So, how do you convey that with all the stark white of gesso on canvas?” Instead, the artist favours rabbit-skin glue as a base, allowing the tone and texture of the canvas support to become an integral aspect of the work. “It makes the canvas very taut, almost like a drum, and after a few coats it takes on a nice glimmer.”

In pieces such as *Jijuu Playing Bingo* (2018) and *Nanuk and Nanogak* (2018) the blaze of early spring pulses against ice and snow, framing the central figures in bright, warm light. In both, the subjects are paused, mid-action—the result of a collision of memory, time and material reference. Each depicts a tender moment spent with family (the artists’ maternal and paternal grandmothers as well as her sister) and both are equally situated between remembrance and photographs; the scene depicted in the former was taken by the artist last year while the latter was captured by a family member more than a decade ago. In each, the easy, gestural quality of Bernhardt’s strokes create scenes that feel familiar and conversational. Bernhardt sees the act of selecting personal photographs as reference material particularly poignant with regards to the long history of colonial visioning of Indigenous subjects. This reversal of the colonial gaze, of who is looking at whom, for what purpose and with what vantage, becomes intertwined with intergenerational knowledge, familial bonds and the sharing of cultural values.

Pattern and colour similarly play a significant role in Bernhardt’s practice, apparent across her figurative works as well as her more abstracted canvases. A floral patterned sofa, a delta trim parka or the orange splattered surface of bingo cards in active play signal the considered specificity of place and time. In works such as *Cutting Caribou* (2018) and *I Learnt How To Swim With My Fanny Pack* (2018), Bernhardt employs a repetitive shape structure with a limited palette of three to four colours to tease out the more tenuous, abstracted recesses of memory. These swirling, dynamic works hint at broader personal narratives tied to pivotal moments of childhood and emerged rapidly, following the completion of more representational images. Creating these pieces “felt quick and also more satisfying,” explains Bernhardt. “It requires putting a different energy into the piece.”

The visual safekeeping undertaken by Bernhardt is fundamentally a radical, personal act, with each memory or moment selected, stretched and suspended primarily for her own understanding of her families’ history, present and future. Speaking on *Jijuu Playing Bingo*, the artist recalls “learning about my heritage and culture by just by sitting within that space, I think that was one of those moments where it was everything I wanted to hold. Memory is always a little bit blurry and how you remember something is often different than how it actually appears as a photograph. How do you translate that space onto canvas?”

— Britt Gallpen
Editorial Director, Inuit Art Quarterly