

KINGULLIIT PRODUCTIONS AND ISUMA PRODUCTIONS PRESENT



TAUTUKTAVUK
WHAT WE SEE

PRESS NOTES

FEATURING

Carol KUNNUK as Saqpinak

Lucy TULUGARJUK as Uyarak

Benjamin KUNUK as Ben

Mark TAQQAUGAQ as Mark

DIRECTORS Lucy TULUGARJUK/ Carol KUNNUK

PRODUCERS Jonathan FRANTZ/ Lucy TULUGARJUK

PRODUCTION DESIGNER Susan AVINGAQ

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Jonathan FRANTZ

WRITERS Lucy TULUGARJUK/ Carol KUNNUK/

Gillian ROBINSON/ Samuel COHN-COUSINEAU

ORIGINAL MUSIC Beatrice DEER/ LUCY TULUGARJUK/ Mark WHEATON

EDITOR Jeremiah HAYES

Running Time 82 Minutes

DCP – Dolby 5.1

Produced with the participation of the Canada Media Fund, Telefilm Canada, Produced with the assistance of the Government of Nunavut and the Nunavut Film Development Corporation, with the collaboration of NITV/UvagutTV and Isuma Distribution International

LOGLINE

Blurring the line between narrative and non-fiction, Uyarak and her eldest sister Saqpinak, embark on a difficult healing journey after a traumatic event that reminds them of the importance of community, culture, and family. *Tautuktavuk (What We See)* explores issues of domestic violence and substance abuse from the perspective of two Inuit women.

SYNOPSIS

After experiencing a traumatic event in Igloodik (an Inuit hamlet in Foxe Basin, Qikiqtaaluk Region in Nunavut), Uyarak leaves her community and family in Nunavut to live in Montréal. When

Covid-19 lockdowns close off the Canadian Arctic from the rest of the world, Uyarak is further separated from her closest friend, eldest sister, Saqpinak. This extreme situation blurs the lines of both the fictional lives of the sisters, and the non-fiction lives of the film's directors, Lucy Tulugarjuk and Carol Kunnuk, who play the sisters.

The film becomes a series of vignettes of heartache and healing – both in the dramatic based-on-true-events narrative, and the lived reality of these characters and creators.

Uyarak doesn't remember much about one terrible night of domestic violence, but Saqpinak does. Through Zoom calls, Uyarak talks about healing from years of trauma and abuse, and how the counselling sessions she goes to, and other cultural reconnections, are helping her heal.

At the same time, Saqpinak is raising a family and hosting live shows about her community. Things are difficult at home – Saqpinak herself is experiencing domestic abuse at home but is waiting to talk about this to Uyarak when she can get home.

When Covid-19 restrictions ease, Uyarak is finally able to travel home to Igloodik. At home, she embarks on a deeper healing journey visiting with family and elders, in town, and out on the land. Uyarak and Saqpinak share more stories and support one another in their short time together before Uyarak must return to Montréal.

About the Co-Directors

Lucy Tulugarjuk is an award-winning actor, creative performer, and the Executive Director of Nunavut Independent Television Network (NITV). NITV created Canada's first 24/7 Inuit language television station, Uvagut TV. Lucy is the co-writer, director of *Tia and Piujuq*, and assistant director for Zacharias Kunuk's, *One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk*. In addition to her work in film and television, Lucy is a skilled Inuktitut translator.

Carol Kunnuk is a filmmaker working in independent television and film with Isuma for over 25 years as a writer, camera operator, production supervisor, assistant director, actor, and editor. Her personal work includes the short, *Being Prepared (NFB)*, and creator/director of the documentary, *Attagatuluk*. Carol currently directs and produces *Welcome to my Qammaq*, a weekly live television show broadcasting across Canada on Uvagut TV.

Lucy Tulugarjuk (Co-Director)

“Carol and I had never had the chance before to be co-directors of a film. This was our opportunity to create something from two women, to show Inuit women's lives never seen before. Our mothers did not have a voice in the way we have a voice now. We both take very seriously that we are messengers from our families and communities, we are the ones with the tools to make films of women speaking from their experiences – tools to work towards changing

some of the terrible injustices we live with. Women are constantly subjected to violence and harassment, and we want this film to make these issues undeniable. During the pandemic, these experiences for women increased astronomically – police would not even go to your house in Igloodik if you had a domestic dispute.

I am the opinionated one. The fiery one. **Saqpinak is calm.** We balance each other. In the film my sister is calm, I go to her with my trauma, my flashbacks. This is the point of view from four women's eyes – mine and Saqpinak's. We directed this film – 'as we see it' – women's stories **as we see it** – truth from our lives. We are beginning to heal from the trauma we went through and live with.

The sisters in this film experience so much – our film touches on very tough emotional places with a lot of painful moments, but from those moments we move on to the next scene, where we have so much love and care, joy and beauty. That's how life happens – there is such beauty in living in the north, such beauty in how these two women, in this story, take care of each other through their trauma, while at the same time taking care of children, their homes. Terrible things happen to them, but they still must go to work the next day, and they still must come home to take care of family. Life goes on. These are lives that can easily lead to substance abuse as a relief from the thoughts of, "How am I going to live through today with all of these terrible things going on?"

We want this film to be empowering for women or children going through these same experiences – feel less alone by seeing the film, with ideas on healing they can take into their lives. ~ Lucy Tulugarjuk

"In our culture putting 'me' as a priority was not acceptable – because in our culture Inuit is 'we' not 'I'. We were taught not to show or talk about feelings to others in the community. It takes a lot of courage to go against our culture by prioritizing oneself, but I know for me to get better, I must look after myself, too. That's why it is so important to acknowledge it's okay to ask for help; it's good to look after myself and look after those I love.

I grew from the experiences of making this film. I use art to express what I am seeing, what I feel, what I hope to see in the future. So much happened to us within these years of making this film, I'm grateful for what I have and I'm grateful for having gone through this storytelling journey."

Carol Kunnuk (Co-Director)

"In 2004, I started to work with Lucy for the first time in the film, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* – she was the Casting Director, and I was Assistant Director for Zacharias Kunuk. I also got to know her in her acting experiences. We've worked together for many years now and share similar visions of the kinds of stories and issues we want to tell. We complement each other

well. Lucy knows a lot about Inuit culture, has a great ability to put a story together and get the best performances out of actors, while I can bring the perspective and expertise of an editor and cinematographer to bring our creative elements together on the screen.

Along with the rest of our talented cast and crew, I believe we made an emotionally powerful and unique work that will excite and inspire audiences – both Inuit and non-Inuit. I see this film as an event taking place in present time, in our Inuit lives in two communities – me in Igloodik and Lucy in Montréal. Covid-19 was very tough and impacted a lot of Inuit people.

I am excited about this new film and the opportunity to tell a story about our contemporary reality with strong female characters in the lead. This is what inspires me, bringing women's perspectives to the forefront, including gender violence, and missing and murdered Indigenous women.”

Tautuktavuk (What We See) – Blurring the Lines between Narrative and Documentary

Tautuktavuk is a film with two heartbeats and more, if you consider all the stories woven into it.

“***Tautuktavuk*** is inspired by true events, but is not autobiographical,” says Lucy Tulugarjuk, who wrote the screenplay with Carol Kunnuk, Gillian Robinson and Samuel Cohn-Cousineau. While not a documentary, and with both Tulugarjuk and Kunnuk directing as well as starring as characters they created, this film explores the notion of ‘point of view’ in a unique cinematic way. “We based the film on true events from many people close to us, and with their permission, we combined the stories into one film. These personal stories are a combination of what our families experienced after being colonized, being in residential school, and dealing with unsupportive social services, with the Government of Canada treating us with continuing terrible disparity in available support services between the north and south.”

Tautuktavuk – The Unlikely Beneficiary of Covid-19

Unlike other productions which had to surmount the challenges of filming during Covid-19, the pandemic served the production on several levels. The forced lockdown brought out in people and communities issues that had previously been deeply buried. The isolation gave people much time to think and ask questions about how does one want to live? What is most important? What is lacking in communities that makes living possible that treats people well?

Covid-19 also presented ***Tautuktavuk*** with a crucial plot-point, separating Uyarak (Tulugarjuk) from her community for an extended period of time after she had to move to Montréal to access social services simply not available in Igloodik, but Covid -19 also gave breathing room in writing the script.

As a result, the whole focus of this film changed. Beginning with one script written at the beginning of Covid, the script was re-written by Tulugarjuk and Kunnuk with support from a team. Then with restrictions and lockdowns, limited production logistics and changing crew constraints, another script organically emerged. Zoom calls and masks became part of the film. Nunavut was isolated from the rest of the world. Elements of personal life challenges for cast and crew became the unexpected contemporary life drama both behind the scenes and in front of the camera.

“This feels like the real script now,” Tulugarjuk notes. “The real sculpture in stone, of violence against women, about missing and murdered women in communities, about the silence within communities of harm done to women. About women who have been abused, of women having the courage to face trauma and beginning to heal. Women who are asking their communities to heal, to voice, to speak of what has happened in the past. Mothers unable to speak, silenced. Trying to teach their daughters to speak out and treat their bodies with respect.”

“This was the most challenging film we’ve ever made,” Tulugarjuk adds, “When we finished the final cut of the film, it was a huge accomplishment for us.”

The Isuma Collective – Cinema in the North

ISUMA, meaning ‘to think,’ is a collective of Inuit-owned related companies based since 1990 in Igloolik, Nunavut with a southern office in Montreal. Four partners: Zacharias Kunuk, Paul Apak, Pauloosie Qulitalik and Norman Cohn, joined together to produce and distribute independent Inuit-language films and media art from an Inuit point of view, featuring local actors recreating Inuit life in the Igloolik region in the 1930s and 1940s. In 2001, the Cannes Film Festival recognized what Isuma was doing, by awarding the *Caméra d’Or* Award to the first of the Inuit-language *Fast Runner* Trilogy: *Atanarjuat - the Fast Runner*. This film was followed by *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* and *Before Tomorrow*. It was a watershed moment for filmmakers in the north, now allowing a *different way of storytelling*. Isuma has a way of telling stories within a certain level of reality – an authentic way of telling stories.

Tautuktavuk – A Collaborative Filmmaking Process

Producer and Director of Cinematography, Jon Frantz, recalls the process of making **Tautuktavuk**: “Filming was very collaborative between Lucy and Carol. They would look at the frame and talk about the emotions that we were trying to get out of the scene. I think the collaborative nature is about not having a certain expectation of how things should be done based on industry and standards or teachings. My own learning has come from working with Zack, Norman, Carol and Lucy. I have been invited to shoot films with the Isuma team because I lived there for five years. I’ve been out hunting on the land, and I definitely don’t see things through their eyes, but I have a little bit more of an appreciation of the world that they live in,

and how they want to represent their story, just from spending time with them and being up in the north.”

Uplifting Female Filmmakers in the North

Unlike their relationship as characters in the film, Tulugarjuk and Kunnuk are not sisters. They are cousins. “We have an intimate understanding of one another,” says Tulugarjuk. “And we brought this intuitive nature to our directing process - sometimes during filming, just an unspoken look between us was our decision about moving ahead with an idea, a shot or a scene.”

Women in the north have many stories that are yet to be told, and *Tautuktavuk* is a testament to the adaptability and strength of the co-directors who gave this film its core and heartbeat. This was a film funded to be directed by two women and written by mainly women.

In the past, there has not been the space or the funding to make women’s vision and stories come alive through film or other mediums. To date, there are still only a handful of women filmmakers in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and the Yukon. Every film made by women is a major milestone in how it encourages other women to speak out, to make their own films about their stories of grandmothers, mothers, sisters, friends and more.

Arnait Video Productions (Tulugarjuk has also worked with Arnait) in the north has created films directed by women. Each new director is a reason to celebrate – elders Susan Avingaq, and Madeline Ivalu, younger directors Alethea Arnaquq-Baril and Stacey Aglok MacDonald. Tulugarjuk and Kunnuk have been working in many roles with Isuma Productions and Kingulliit Productions, towards directing their own films over a 25-year process. Isuma has been training and working towards launching its women filmmakers for many years.

Social Change and Challenges in the North

Tautuktavuk sheds light on the social challenges of living up north and what resources are not made available comparable to the south. For anyone trying to go through a treatment process to help with alcohol addiction or substance abuse in Nunavut, the support infrastructure and programs for people who are getting help is not there. Services that are available are understaffed; reaching out to the local health centre means making phone calls that aren't returned because jobs are vacant. As a result, people often have to go to a private facility outside of their community which means traveling to Ottawa or Montreal, leaving behind their entire infrastructure of family and friend support systems.

Carol Kunnuk – “There’s also a real fear that when going to the authorities for help about abuse in the home, the response from Child Services will be, ‘Well, that’s an unhealthy home’, and

children can be removed from home and put into foster care. That fear prevents people from asking for help, as no one wants their children taken away. People in these positions in Social Services are well intended, and they think they're doing good things, but they just don't have the time or the skills or the resources to really address the situation, so it's preventing people from reaching out for help.”

Impact

“I think the film can encourage more conversations,” says Tulugarjuk, “It would be ignorant to say *change*. We know change is going to take a long time and involve a lot of different people. Carol and I hope this film, when it is viewed, will just start more conversations. We hope that people can ask difficult questions about things they may be worried about, and somehow those conversations happen in other rooms after the screening, over coffee, or dinner, or the next day with friends, or however those thoughts percolate through people.

With all the negative change for Inuit within such a short period of time – 50 to 100 years – I used to wonder as I got older, ‘Why am I carrying such a lot of hurt? Why am I targeting people that I love the most with my anger?’” My search has been to try to understand what happened to make me be this way. Hopefully this film can pass on to audiences the message that even if we have hardships, there are ways to seek help. To heal, there must be change, and we don’t need to be ashamed of seeking help.”