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# UIKSARINGITARA WRONG HUSBAND

# PRESS NOTES

STARRING Theresia KAPPIANAQ as Kaujak Haiden ANGUTIMARIK as Sapa

WITH
Leah PANIMERA as Nujatut
Mark TAQQAUGAQ as Makpa
Devon Dion AMARUALIK as Angusiaq
Emma QUASSA as Ulluriaq
Karen IVALU as Fog Lady

Running time 100 minutes DCP – Dolby 5.1

Shot on location in Igloolik, Nunavut.

Produced with the participation of Canada Media Fund, Telefilm Canada, the Indigenous Screen Office, with the assistance of the Government of Nunavut and the Nunavut Film Development Corporation, and broadcaster support from Uvagut TV.

#### **SYNOPSIS**

Igloolik, Nunavut, 2000 BCE. Kaujak (Theresia Kappianaq) and Sapa (Haiden Angutimarik) were promised to each other at birth. After the sudden death of Kaujak's father, her mother marries a man from another camp tearing the young lovers apart. The promise of a better life quickly turns to a nightmare, with aggressive suitors backed by an evil shaman vying to win Kaujak's hand. But Kaujak resists, holding on to hope that Sapa will one day make things right.

#### **PRODUCTION NOTES**

*Uiksaringitara* (*Wrong Husband*) is the latest feature film by award-winning Canadian Inuit director Zacharias Kunuk, starring Theresia Kappianaq, Haiden Angutimarik, Leah Panimera, Mark Taqqaugaq, and Dion Amarualik, many of whom are newcomers to the screen. Best known for his 2001 feature film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, winner of the 2001 Camera d'Or and voted Canada's Best Film of All-Time by the Toronto International Film Festival Film Critic poll in 2015, Kunuk is considered one of the pioneers of Indigenous cinema, having directed five feature films and over 40 documentaries all in Inuktitut.

**Uiksaringitara (Wrong Husband)** is co-written by Kunuk and Samuel Cohn-Cousineau (Tautuktavuk: What We See, Tia and Piujuq), and produced by Carol Kunnuk, Jonathan Frantz (Tautuktavuk: What We See, The Shaman's Apprentice, One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk) and Cohn-Cousineau, with Susan Avingaq (Tautuktavuk: What We See, Tia and Piujuq, Uvanga) and Zacharias Kunuk serving as executive producers and Cecilia Greyson (Tautuktavuk: What We See) as Associate Producer.

Cinematography by Jonathan Frantz and Thomas Leblanc-Murray (Festin Boréal, Me Without You), costume design by Susan Avingaq, production design by Avingaq and Melanie McNicoll (Uvanga) and editing by Kunuk, Frantz and Raphael Sandler (Sam & Jean).

The film is being distributed in Canada by Isuma Distribution International.

Inspired by traditional Inuit stories and legends, *Uiksaringitara*: *Wrong Husband* is set in 2000 BCE, when Inuit lived semi-nomadically in small groups, moving to follow the seasons and animals. Society was guided by Shamanism, a complex spiritual system of taboos where each object or life form has a spirit that must be respected, and the lines between the "real" world and the "spirit" world blurred.

"All of my films are based in local stories and traditions from my local area," said Kunuk. "For me, a film has to not only have a strong, unique story and characters that people can relate to, it also has to be very accurate to the local traditions of my area. I see my role and responsibility as a filmmaker and artist as someone who can record and document our past traditions and culture for future generations, to re-write our history from our perspective. 100 years from now when we are long gone, our films will still be here to show people how it was done. That is why everything needs to be very accurate, so I work with elders and experts to make sure the dialogue, costumes and clothing, tools, etc. are exactly as it would have been in the past."

"Here in the Arctic, as part of the Isuma collective, we do things differently; we are a small community with limited resources, so we operate more horizontally than hierarchically. I will sit down and discuss creative decisions with the film crew, my cameraman and my assistant director, then we try things out and see how they work. It takes a long time. When we go into casting, we look for particular kinds of actors and have a particular way of making collective decisions. Some of the young people we work with as actors are very, very camera shy. We have to tell them we are doing this for the future of our culture. This way I hope other Inuit filmmakers can be inspired to interpret these stories in their own way," Kunuk explained.

"Everything - the timing, our schedule, the financing - worked out and this was the right time to make the film. Zach is finally able to tell the story that he's been trying to make for 15 years," said Producer/Cinematographer, Jonathan Frantz.

#### In Inuit Law, A Promise is a Promise.

*Uiksaringitara* (*Wrong Husband*) deals with classical epic themes of fate, justice, murder, and jealousy. In this harsh world where everyone is so dependent on each other to survive, there is little room for questioning authority or "the way things are."

The southern notion of agency takes on an entirely different meaning in the north, whether it be 2000 BCE or in more modern times. "When you are living in an extremely challenging environment like that, authority is based on pragmatic merit," said Co-writer and Producer Samuel Cohn-Cousineau. "If you're out in a hunting party to catch a walrus, and the person who's the most experienced hunter says, we should go this way, everyone agrees because your survival depends on it. When the most experienced seamstress says this is how you should sew this parka, it's not up for debate. And when Sapa comes back from the hunt and his promised wife, Kaujak is gone, he had no say in it. His parents say that's the way things are. You have to respect your elders. You have to respect your parents' decision."

Specific objectives motivate Kunuk's work: "Inuit have thousands of years of oral tradition across the north, exchanging songs and games and legends from Russia to Greenland. We have so many spiritual stories, love stories, scary stories, fantastic creatures, and spirit helpers. I want to bring Inuit sensibility to the forefront so people across the world can see what guided us before colonization."

Kunuk's filmmaking practice is all about talking back to the colonial forces, reclaiming history from the inside, and preserving local traditions. He feels that this story, set in the distant past, may very well be one of the last opportunities to record and preserve the knowledge necessary to produce all the traditional clothing, tools, and portrayal of traditional customs, songs, and spirituality while there still are a few remaining elders alive who can teach younger generations how to do it the right way. To that end, all the costumes were hand sewn from animal furs, while props, and tools were made from wood, stone and bone.

Filmed on location in Nunavut during the 24hr daylight of the arctic tundra, the film combines meticulous attention to detail with a meditative *cinema-verité* observational style and applies it to creating immersive historical drama that transport audiences into a world that they have never seen before.

The story of *Uiksaringitara* (*Wrong Husband*) was based on a series of conversations conducted in 2007 with a group of elders on the topic of arranged marriages and traditional lnuit beliefs. The production team heard personal stories of families being arranged into marriage, and of the types of games and challenges men would do to win parental approval over daughters. An Igloolik elder told the story of how he unwittingly married a promised woman and had to brutally fight this man to keep her, only to lose and have her taken away. One of the film's producers, Carol Kunnuk, recalled how her grandparents were arranged to be married when they were only 12 years old and grew up as teenagers knowing they would one day be married.

"In Inuit law, a promise is a promise," Kunuk noted. "You can't go around it. In our culture, our old culture, arranged marriages used to be done. They were being done when I was born in 1957. Also, when I was young, shamanism was forbidden. Drum dancing was forbidden. Storytelling was forbidden by the church."

#### The Cast

Of the entire cast, only Leah Panimera (Kaujak 's mother) and Mark Taqqaugaq, (Kaujak's mother's second husband) are experienced actors. The rest are total newcomers to the screen. When the casting call went out, close to 80 people responded. Kunuk wanted to use this film as an opportunity to introduce new people to the filmmaking experience.

"Casting is definitely Zach's domain," noted Jonathan Frantz. "He takes it very, very seriously. He does a lot of pre-interviews with people, has them read some lines on camera, takes their photos, and put them all up on a wall. It's an ongoing, evolving collage, where he'll move them around, sit and stare at them and maybe draw some face tattoos on them to see if they look like a believable family."

One of the benefits of shooting in Nunavut is that it's a small community and Kunuk already knows most of the people there. It makes an open casting call easy. And for a cast that is largely first-time actors, he will choose characters to represent who the actors really are.

If a character is a hunter, he will cast a hunter. If it's an emotional role, he'll pick somebody who has that sensibility, or really tries to get to know the person

It was the role of First Assistant Director Natar Ungalaaq, (who was the lead in Kunuk's *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*) to guide the new actors through the process because he remembers being very shy when it

was his first time in front of the camera: "One of the biggest challenges with the new actors was to get them to stop staring at the camera when they were delivering their lines." The way they achieved this was by fully explaining to everyone in the cast, main characters all the way to background layers, the full story and where they fit in.

Everyone, cast and crew, lived at a camp on set for over a month which had a strong bonding effect. Frantz observed that for some of the new actors, the long hours on set, the hurry-up-and-wait pacing of production mixed with the intensity of hearing "Action" and having to draw on these emotions and then shut them off really had an appeal. Others, not quite so much. But overall, it was a unique and compelling new experience. "There's not that many opportunities to act up in Nunavut, but the people there have really great performing skills. It's a very artistic community."

#### Costumes

Inuit culture has stayed basically the same for some 4,000 years, something the late award-winning filmmaker Susan Avingaq, Artistic Director, Costume Designer and Production Designer for the film, as well as an active teacher of sewing traditions, fully understood. The goal was authenticity — as much of it as possible. To that end, all costumes were made by elders who had younger assistants so they could learn the skills.

"When I'm thinking authenticity, I'm thinking that when I'm six feet in the ground, a hundred years from now, maybe my people will study my films to understand the kind of costumes that were made," Kunuk said.

The design for the Troll, known in Inuit mythology as Qallupilluit, was created entirely from oral history. Kunuk explained: "Every child in the community was warned not to wander too far from camp or the troll might get them. We also heard stories from people who had been captured by the troll. We knew she had a big nose. She was creepy and slimy with a big hump on her back. I heard about this young boy who got caught, and the troll let him play on top of the ice but tied to her with a rope. When the parents tried to get their boy back, the troll would just pull the boy down and take off."

In fact, the Troll is played by Guillaume Saladin Ittukssarjuat, a circus performer who has spent half his life in Igloolik because his father, an anthropologist, had come up to the area back in the 1970s interviewing elders. And so, Guillaume knows the land, the people and the culture quite well from a Southern perspective.

Kunuk recalled how the spirit Fog Lady should have special clothes. He shared with Susan Avingaq images of South Baffin women with impressive fan-shaped outfits. "She did a fabulous job stitching up the Fog Lady's elaborate costume from those images. The spirit Caribou Man served as training coach for young Sapa to fight for Kaujak's hand, so his appearance was more down to earth and natural. Our elders know how to stitch these costumes. When I give them my lead actor, Kaujak, they looked at her, measured her by hand, by string, and cut up the caribou skin and sewed it. When she put it on, it was a beautiful costume that fit perfectly. That's what I wanted because the people who know are passing away and we are forgetting."

#### **DIRECTOR'S NOTES – ZACHARIAS KUNUK**

I was born in 1957. We lived in a sod house Kapuivik on Baffin Island, like our fathers before us, but we had new tools. Before they used to just live in stone. Since we had axes, we were able to chop up frozen food and moss. My parents built a winter house with sod from prairie grass, which has a much thicker and tougher root system than modern lawn grass. A whaling ship's mast stood in the center of the main room with a cross beam tented with sail cloth and caribou skins.

Namesake is very important in our culture. When I was born, I was given five names. My father's mother had passed away, so I inherited her name. So when I was growing up my father always called me Mother. I try to put details like this in my films. It's distracting, I know, when you are not in the culture, but it fits well. There was a very strict rule not to say given names, so we would always use nicknames. When Kaujak, for instance, calls her mother Younger Sister, it is because her mother had inherited a sister's given name. Two men in the film call each other Wifeless Buddy because they used that nickname as young men and it stuck, even after one got married. And instead of Sapa and Kaujak calling each other by name, they always say Future Husband and Future Wife.

We were in a camp with several sod houses, but always moving to another place, Then there was one camp where we were sort of outcasts, hungry all the time. So my father moved us away. He was more a caribou hunter than a walrus hunter, so we moved further up the Baffin Island coast for the caribou.

I remember bagging my first caribou. I was just starting to learn to hunt at the age of eight. My father showed me how to shoot this 22-caliber rifle, but I was so small he had to put a string on the charging handle so I could cock it. It was great. About a year later, my older brother and I left my parents to go to school in Igloolik.

The move to Igloolik was the first time we had lived in a wooden house and in a place where we stayed all year round. We lived with close relatives - about fifteen of us in a little match box with bunk beds. There was also a school building, and some children lived in dormitories. We fit right in as part of the community, but there were no more hunting lessons after I moved to town.

I learned to carve soapstone watching this young man, David, trying to carve and then carving alongside him. We wanted to go to the movies. It cost a quarter to get in but no one would give us the money. In our culture, soapstone was used for seal oil lamps and cooking pots. That was about it. We were able to carve pieces out of left over chips of it we picked up from the ground. They were enough to get us to the movies.

Everyone moved on to carving big animals, like seals, walruses and polar bears, but I wanted to do humans, like mother and child, and some spirits. Carving soapstone was a very dirty job. I was so covered with dust that I needed a shower after each carving session. And the dust was not good for my lungs, so I was already thinking about making videos.

In 1981, I sold some carvings to buy a PortaPak VCR camera and tripod and VCR to watch what I was shooting, as we did not have TV service in Igloolik at the time. The handheld camera was attached by cable to a bulky recorder unit on a shoulder strap. When I brought everything home, I read the manuals to try to figure it all out. Later on, when I had two VCRs, I would try a very rough edit on one tape, but it didn't work very well. I found that using the video camera was a lot like carving soapstone. I would still have to tell a story and blend each stroke well into the whole picture.

I tried but did not get into the Inuktitut project launched by Inuit Broadcasting Corporation in '78/79. When I finally joined Inuit Broadcasting in the mid-eighties, the technology was still not great. If you pointed the camera at the sun it would burn out the tube. I worked at the Iglookik Center with Paul Apak and Simon Quassa. We got to know all about lighting, editing, sound and the camera, and quickly became jacks of all trades.

The production of Isuma's first feature, Atanarjuat The Fast Runner, came about because we wanted to hear our voice - the Inuktitut language - on TV. Most of all, we wanted to record our culture. When we used to do interviews with elders, they loved to tell great stories. But then at the editing table, there was no footage to illustrate them. That's what drove me to recreate the past. I was lucky because all the

people who came off the land were in Igloolik. They still knew how to stitch caribou and sealskin clothes and build traditional sleds.

We owe so much in our films to these elders. Elders who worked on many of our past films, like Samuelie Ammaq, Eugene Ipkanark, and Deborah Qaunaq, were consultants on the script. They made sure the story, the actions, and the dialogue was right. Susan Avingaq, who passed away this year, was Artistic Director on Wrong Husband. She was a renowned storyteller, filmmaker and seamstress, and an active teacher of sewing traditions. She loved the culture so much and wanted to share it with everyone. Susan was always there on all the major films I worked on. Without her this film could not have been made.

When I started using the camera, independently telling stories like our elders would do, one of the main comments was that I was trying to be like a white man. We were the smiling ones. I took that in and just kept going forward.

Inuit culture dates back and has stayed basically the same for some 4,000 years. Like Atanarjuat The Fast Runner, Wrong Husband is rooted in traditional oral history. Changes could be traced in the stitching on various garments, but the tenor of life did not change. It is amazing that in our culture nothing was written down. They would just take a look at you and figure out who you were.

When I started laying out the script for Wrong Husband, there were no spirits or shamans in the story, just people. When I finished writing I had the feeling something was missing. Then we found that depicting a universe of shamans and spirits playing out the struggle of right versus wrong on a track intersecting with and impacting human lives added a lot to the whole story. The boy kidnapped by the troll in the opening sequence calls out for his sister, who later becomes the spirit Fog Lady, dedicated to protecting Kaujak and Sapa from the Troll. The good lady shaman Ulluriaq was helped by the Fog Lady and spirit Caribou Man, whereas Attiaq, the evil old long shaman with long white hair, was in league with the Troll and the Wolf.

The spirit helpers are all shape shifters, but we did not plan on using special effects to enhance their presence until postproduction. And then mainly for the most ethereal character, the Fog Lady.

Since Christianity bulldozed over our culture about 100 years ago, most people are just preparing to die. Catholics and Anglicans taught us to repent. They instill the fear of death and deny the existence of helping spirits, even as our culture still recognizes them as part of life.

The funeral scene depicts traditional lnuit rites of the dead, who were left out on the land. This in contrast to Christian rites of putting the dead in boxes covered with rocks. Our belief is that if rocks are placed over a dead body the soul will be stuck.

We can never find traditional funeral sites on our land because bodies in time would completely decompose or be eaten by animals. We depicted a detail I once heard about funeral processions. Followers would put a feather in the left nostril. The sound of the lulu spinning beads used at the funeral fascinated me. It blew my mind to discover the same beads are used in Aboriginal Australian culture. How did we get to have the same tradition?

The production of Wrong Husband recruited a good number of young people and first timers as well as regulars in the cast and crew. The two leads, Theresia Kappianaq and Haiden Angutimarik were new to acting. Finding them was like a hunting expedition for the right faces. They had to be round, as most lnuit faces are. I went on community radio to announce auditions. Usually, when we are looking for young actors they are in school throughout the day. After school, Susan Avingaq and I held taped auditions to see who was good at line readings. We also go to know who was willing and who would show up. Once

our actors were hired, Natar Ungalaaq, who played the lead in Atanarjuat The Fast Runner, became their acting coach. He focused on what to expect, what to do and what not to do.

We usually work fast on Isuma sets. We hardly ever use lights in favor of reflectors, which require near zero setup time. But on Wrong Husband we had so many people on set that everything went more slowly. I wanted to shoot a film in summer because I was finding myself dreading winter scenes, where all the time it's cold and it's hard on the equipment.

I am presently developing a documentary and looking for new stories to tell. When I work on documentaries, I am like a detective trying to solve a problem. What is causing the problem? We do a lot of research and then we talk to people. My documentaries are contemporary stories, and my narrative works will continue to be ancient stories. I like doing both.

Like the rest of the world. in Igloolik these days, we watch most of our films on the Internet. Our young people are largely bi-lingual - talking mostly English among themselves to be cool, even though they know how to speak Inuktitut. But it is good that the older they get, the more they speak Inuktitut.

My hope is that Wrong Husband inspires a new generation of storytellers in our community to make films of their own; and for our culture thereby to enhance the lives of audiences at home and everywhere.

#### ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

ZACHARIAS KUNUK (Executive Producer/Producer/Director/Co-Writer/Editor) is the co-founder Igloolik Isuma Productions Inc. In addition to the feature Atanarjuat The Fast Runner (2001 Cannes Camera d'Or, "Best Canadian Film of all-time" 2015 Toronto International Film Festival Film Critic Poll), Kunuk has directed more than 30 documentaries and feature films including Atanarjuat The Fast Runner, The Journals of Knud Rasmussen, Maliglutit (Searchers), and the Oscar-shortlisted animation film Angakusajaujuq (The Shaman's Apprentice). His 2019 film One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk premiered as the main art piece of the Canadian Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale, where Kunuk and the Isuma Collective were Canada's representative artists. In 2003, he founded the distribution company Isuma Distribution International, to allow Inuit audiences better access to Inuktitut film and video and in 2008, the website www.isuma.tv. In 2015, he was named an Officer of the Order of Canada, and in 2019, an Officer of the Order of Nunavut.

JONATHAN FRANZ (Producer/Cinematographer/Editor) is a film producer and director of photography working with the Isuma artists' collective. After completing a Masters degree in community planning at the University of British Columbia, Jonathan spent four years living in the community of Igloolik, Nunavut, where he worked with the award-winning Inuit director Zacharias Kunuk. As a lead producer and director of photography, Jonathan has worked on six feature length documentaries, two documentary mini-series, and four feature films, including Maliglutit (Searchers) (2016), One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk (2019), and the stop motion film The Shaman's Apprentice (2021). Jonathan was also a producer on SGaawaay K'uuna (Edge of the Knife) (2018), the world's first Haida-language feature film. Jonathan is currently producing two projects with Kunuk, the 10-part documentary series called They Have to Hear Us: Canada's Duty to Consult Inuit.

**SAMUEL COHN-COUSINEAU** (**Producer/Co-Writer**) has been working in film since 2016, first as a distribution coordinator and now director of distribution, overseeing distribution activities, national marketing campaigns, and community film tours of many award-winning Inuit and Indigenous-produced films. He was production manager on Zacharias Kunuk's 2019 film One Day in the Life of Noah Piuggatuk. Other than **Uiksaringitara** (**Wrong Husband**), he is also a producer on a two new 10-part documentary series directed by Kunuk called *They Have to Hear Us: Canada's Duty to Consult Inuit*. He also has writing credits on the children's film *Tia and Piujuq* (2018) with director Lucy Tulugarjuk, and the newly- released feature film *Tautuktavuk* (What We See) (TIFF Top Ten '23), co-written with Carol Kunnuk and Lucy Tulugarjuk.

**CAROL KUNNUK** (**Producer**) 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*, and the award-winning feature film *Tautuktavuk* (What We See) (TIFF Top Ten '23). Carol currently directs and produces *Welcome to my Qammaq*, a weekly live television show broadcasting across Canada on Uvagut TV. She is currently in post-production on a 13-part documentary series called *Sanajaiit: Inuit Makers*, profiling Inuit artists in various parts of the country.

**SUSAN AVINGAQ (Executive Producer/Production Designer/Costume Designer),** who passed away in 2024, was an award-winning director, art director and set designer in film based out of Igloolik. Avingaq was also a renowned seamstress, writer, actor, performer and storyteller, and worked in production in costume design, art design and as a cultural consultant. She served as Art Director for the films Before Tomorrow (2008) and Uvanga (2013), Maliglutit (2016), and One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk (2021). In 2014 she co-directed the documentary SOL (Best Film 2014 Rendez-Vous du Cinéma Québecois, Best Documentary at 2014 Canadian Screen Awards), which investigates the death of an Inuk youth and the underlying social issues of Canada's north. She also wrote the children's books Fishing with Grandma (2016) and The Pencil (2019), winner of the United States Board on Books for Young People 2020 Outstanding International Book Award.

RAPHAËL SANDLER (Editor) graduated from Concordia University's film production program in 2018. His directorial work is largely non-fiction and experimental, often featuring family and friends. Much of his work is made up of found footage. Sources of this material include familial archives, corporate archives, and youtube. Raphaël is a founder of the Neighbourhood Film Festival, a festival held jointly in Montreal, and Philadelphia. His feature documentary Island Cowboy Raphaël is currently based out of Montreal and working as an editor and live show producer for Isuma Productions and Uvagut TV, PSJC

### **ABOUT THE CAST**

**THERESA KAPPIANAQ** (Kaujak) lives in Igloolik, where she was born and raised. *Uiksaringitara* (Wrong *Husband*) is her first time acting. She would like to continue working in film as an actor and is also interested in learning more about camera work.

HAIDEN ANGUTIMARIK (Sapa, the right husband) lives in Igloolik, where he was born and raised. Uiksaringitara (Wrong Husband) is his first time acting. He would like to keep acting and working in film and television in the future.

**LEAH PANIMERA** (**Nujatut, Kaujak's mother**) is an experienced actor and performer from Igloolik. She made her acting debut as the female lead in Kunuk's 2006 film *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, in the role of Apak. She has also worked as a production assistant on other Igloolik productions.

MARK TAQQAUGAQ (Makpa, Kaujak's stepfather) is an experienced actor from Igloolik. Films he has played in include: Maliglutit (Searchers), One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk, and Tautuktavuk (What We See). He also recently played a minor role in the upcoming Mission: Impossible – The Final Reckoning.

**KAREN IVALU (Fog Lady)** lives in Igloolik, where she was born and raised. She made her first film appearance in Zacharias Kunuk's 2016 film *Maliglutit* (Searchers), where she was the supporting female role.

EMMA QUASSA (Ulluriag) is from Igloolik. This is her first film role.

DEVON DION AMARUALIK (Angusiaq, the wrong husband) is from Igloolik. This is his first time acting.

**GUILLAUME SALADIN ITTUKSSARJUAT** (The Troll) grew up partly in Igloolik until the age of 15. After graduating from the National Circus School and touring the world with Cirque Éloize, he has dedicated his passion and career to collaboratively leading Artcirq, a youth circus group he co-founded in 1998. Since then, Artcirq has travelled the world creating a rich body of work featured on a national and international stage.

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