

## SUSIE SILOOK: ON INSPIRATION

Susie Silook is a Siberian Yupik/Inupiaq writer, carver, and sculptor. She works in the traditional media of ivory and baleen; her themes blend the traditional with contemporary issues confronting Native Alaskans. She also departs from tradition by depicting women in her carvings rather than the animals most commonly rendered by men. When asked about the source of her inspiration, here are some of her written responses (reprinted from *Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation 2*, New York: Museum of Arts & Design, 2006, p. 80)



*Inside My Mind, 2002*

When asked to write about the subject of my source of inspiration, I had to mull the 20 years of my career over in my mind, and go beyond my dusty studio to find something intangible, something frustratingly elusive to define.

Let's establish immediately that I do what I do to support myself and my family. My materials stem from this fact; the walrus continue to nourish the Native people of Alaska as they have for centuries, and the ivory has always been used to produce tools, housewares, religious items, and toys. Since European contact, the demand for ivory has shifted its use towards objects made for cash. It's an extension of the subsistence economy. . . .

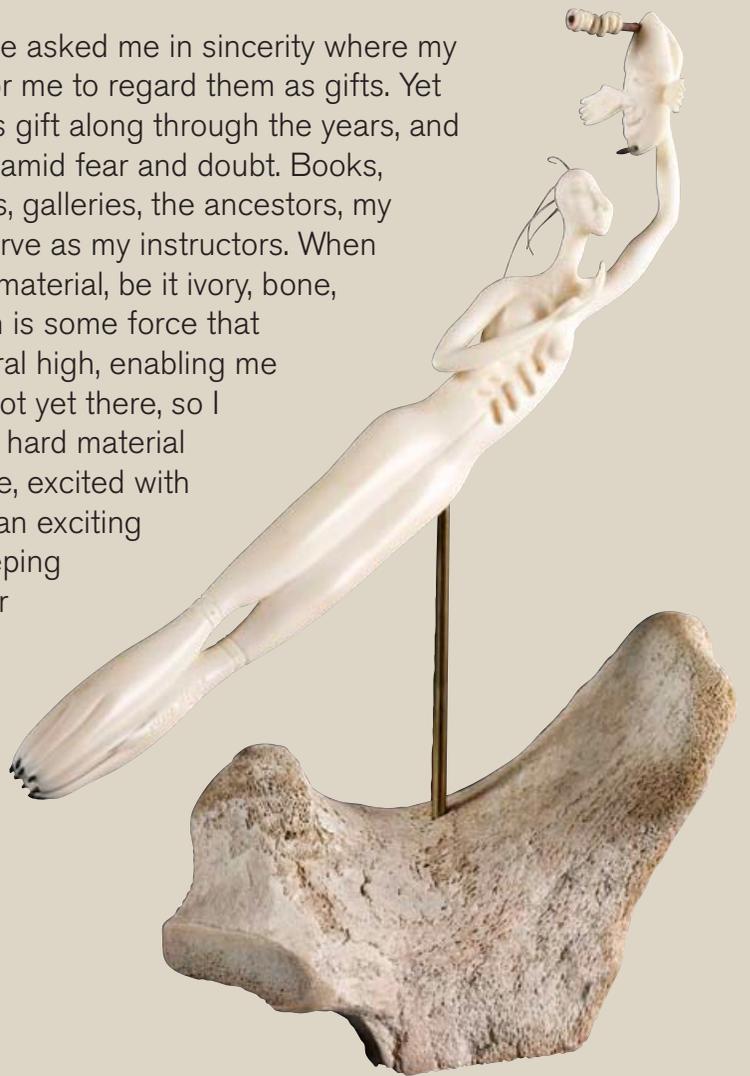
In writing this, I'm struck by the difference between what motivates and what inspires. The necessity of survival and the streak of rebelliousness are motivational forces, but they do not inspire. They serve to navigate me through the tremendous physical effort required of a sculptor of stubborn mediums. Inspiration is a whole different source of impulse.

Enough people have asked me in sincerity where my ideas come from for me to regard them as gifts. Yet I've had to coax this gift along through the years, and it's had to blossom amid fear and doubt. Books, friends, other artists, galleries, the ancestors, my parents—they all serve as my instructors. When I finally sit with my material, be it ivory, bone, or stone, inspiration is some force that fills me with a natural high, enabling me to see something not yet there, so I make my mark into hard material and began to create, excited with new possibility. It's an exciting new beginning, keeping me coming back for more.



*Looking Inside Myself, 2002*

*Sedna with Mask, 1999*



## ***YUA Spirit of the Arctic***

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