



Joe Talirunili, *Untitled (Migration)*, 1964,  
steatite, sealskin, bone, synthetic sinew, red paint, 33 x 19.7 x 30 cm,  
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Joe Talirunili's (1893–1976) mixed-media sculpture *Untitled (Migration)* (1964) is based on the incredible tale of a treacherous twelve-week voyage across Arctic terrain to the Ottawa Islands at the eastern edge of Canada's Hudson Bay. Among the forty migrants were the artist's

grandparents and father, travelling by dogsled and battling the Arctic's formidable conditions in order to reach the annual festivities where the area's fur trading resources were located. This journey was extremely dangerous, resulting in many deaths and near-starvation. When it seemed like all was lost for the weary Inuit travellers, the artist's grandmother encouraged the group to build an *umiak*—a traditional family or women's boat—in order to reach a nearby island. Mustering up the last of their materials and strength, the group only barely made it to their destination after firing sacrificial gunshots in the direction of the island as a final spiritual plea. Following in the storytelling tradition of the Purvirnituk, Talirunili has created a sculpture immortalizing the legend of how his family's legacy was secured. This work contains some of the materials used in the construction of the *umiak*, such as seal skin, wood and bone. The artist captures not only the climate of fear and hope on the travellers' facial expressions, but also the strength of community in the face of overwhelming obstacles. *Untitled (Migration)* is one of many works in the artist's sculptural series investigating themes of migration and cultural heritage, although this piece uniquely pays tribute to the travellers of this journey by featuring their incised names on the bottom of the boat.

Sarah Amarica