Ruben Komangapik is an artist in his late 30’s who has been working steadily and creatively for the past 15 years. Primarily known for his mixed media sculptures, he is also a musician, performing both traditional Inuit drumming and singing as well as playing bass guitar in the heavy metal band Slayvz.

Born in the regional hospital in Iqaluit, his home community is Pond Inlet (Mittimatalik) on the high north-east coast of Baffin Island (Qikiqtaluk). He grew up there as well as in Arctic Bay and Clyde River until the age of nine. As is common in northern Inuit communities, his paternal grandparents, Joshua and Enuya Komangapik played an influential role in his upbringing until their death within months of each other in 1981. They ensured that Komangapik learned Inuit customs and experienced a hunting lifestyle out at the family camp, side by side with life in town and a formal school education.

In particular, Komangapik speaks with great respect of his grandfather, admiring his ability to create everything by hand with limited means, from complicated tools to household furniture to sculptures for sale locally. He recalls sitting with Joshua while he carved in materials that ranged from animal parts such as ivory and whale bone to metals scraps including copper and silver. He traces his interest in art-making to these times, when he borrowed his grandfather’s tools and began making his own toys, such as qamutiiit (sleds) and small sculptures. Komangapik also learned to carve arctic themes from his father Mikiseetee Komangapik and with Markoosie Akpaliapik in classes at Takijualuk School in the mid-1980s.

Komangapik had an equally close relationship with his maternal grandparents, Hermann and Sophie Steltner, German scientists who initially came to Pond Inlet to study sea ice and ocean phenomena, and stayed for twenty-five years. Both are buried in Pond Inlet. In 1989, he moved to St. Catherine’s Ontario with his grandparents and attended Ridley College, a private school with a large enrolment of international students.

In 1992, he returned to Pond Inlet to live with his father for a year before joining his mother, Dorothee Komangapik, in Iqaluit where she was teaching at Nunavut Arctic College. He enrolled in the metalwork program at the college and with the birth of his first child, became serious about pursuing a career as an artist. He obtained a college certificate in 1995, and

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1 The community’s English name relates to the body of water between Bylot Island and Baffin Island which was named Pond’s Bay after a British astronomer, by explorer John Ross in 1818. The Inuktitut name Mittimatalik means "the place where Mittima is buried" although the identity of this individual is not recorded. Nunavut Handbook, Nortext MultiMedia Inc, Iqaluit, 1998, 323; Unless otherwise noted, biographical information comes from telephone conversation, Ruben Komangapik (Caplan, QC) to Christine Lalonde (Ottawa, ON), 14 October 2014 and 22 October 2014.
continued on to a diploma degree in Jewellery and Metalwork in 1997. After teaching workshops for the college in Sanikiluaq, Iqaluit, Hall Beach, and Salluit, he has continued his practice as a self-employed artist with significant commissions such as the government of Nunavut’s travelling mace (with Mathew Nuqingaq) and Qulliq (a traditional seal oil lamp made entirely of silver) commissioned by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and presented to the Governor General in celebration of the creation of Nunavut in 1999.

Komangapik currently works out of his home studio in Caplan in the Gaspé region of Québec, selling his sculptures to collectors directly as well as through galleries which focus on new approaches in Inuit art such as Spirit Wrestler Gallery and Feheley Fine Arts.

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