

This is the story of **“The Earth, Our Mother,”** and the most important message I can think of sharing. It may be long for some, so at first I thought I would write a condensed version—I couldn’t. The people I’d like to reach the most through this truthful tale are the ones with the patience, persistence, and unconditional drive to right our wrongs on our only true home: the Earth. I love science, culture, poetry, nature, visual arts, and truth. This is my attempt to merge them all.

BILLY GAUTHIER

ARTIST STATEMENT



My sculpture represents the Earth and acknowledges that SHE IS ALIVE. It was carved from a fin whale skull that stands 4' 8" tall, 6' 8" wide, 30" deep and weighs over 600lbs, the biggest piece by far I've ever worked on to date. This skull is from the second-largest animal on our planet! The moment I first erected this giant fin whalebone in the position it remains in, I was fixated on the only prominent feature on an almost blank gargantuan canvas, the void for the spinal column and brain cavity. The skull was able to speak through this feature that became her **mouth**. I could now hear her voice.

Next, I began to carve her **eyes**, so she could see me and any other viewers. Then, her **nostrils**, so she could breathe better and smell the world around her. These carved features gave her all the senses she needed. I was asked at one point, "Where are her ears?" I responded with, "The earth doesn't need ears, it is us that needs to listen to her teachings. She sees what we do."

I keep referring to this piece as "she" because all life comes from her, the Earth. Therefore, she gives birth to all life we know, including humanity. To show that she is female, I carved v-shaped patterns on her forehead symbolizing **tunniit** (traditional Inuit tattoos), like many Inuit women in the past. Inuit men didn't wear these markings. Today tunniit is making a comeback and I have to admit, I think they look beautiful and love to see our culture's women today adorning these fine lines and dots with pride on their vibrant faces and bodies!

The first piece of art I ever saw was a carving of a snowy owl given to me by my father when I was first born. So on the top of "The Earth, Our Mother" I carved two snowy owl **feathers**. My introduction to art and nature was given to me the day I was

born, and my most breathtaking experience ever was rescuing a snowy owl from drowning, with my good friend Kara Montague. The yellow eyes of this magnificent female bird are forever burned into my memory until the day I breathe no more! I needed to record this moment in this bone to show the gifts our ultimate Mother gives for listening and loving.

My favorite place on earth is the Torngat Mountains National Park, so I added a likeness of the jagged **mountain range**, with its fast-moving, condensed snake-like clouds that almost mimic the Northern Lights in a muted white colour. The Torngat Mountains have, for many generations, been considered sacred for Inuit in my area and even abroad. My ancestors believed this was the birthplace of all life and all spirits. When I first travelled to the park in 2009, I had a chance to meet with geologists and pick their brains a little. I asked, "Can you please tell me how old some of the rocks have been dated here?" They replied, "The oldest so far have been dated to 3.89 billion years." The Earth is approximately 4.54 billion years old according to science today. I realized then that my ancestors knew much more than most had given them credit for. In 2017, several articles were published showing that the Torngat Mountain range potentially holds, within its rocks, the oldest signs of organic material ever discovered on the Earth so far (this is, however, disputed as all new findings must be peer-reviewed and studied vigorously before the scientific community accepts these findings as truth, even then we must continue to study as new dating techniques are discovered). Regardless, there is little to no doubt that these carbon-rich materials encased in the Torngat Mountains are ancient and at the very least, some of the oldest signs of life discovered on Earth.

On the bottom of this mask-like representation of the Earth, we have, stretching from one side to the other, **water** symbolizing our oceans, lakes, seas, and rivers. Much of my time spent in nature is on and around these majestic fluid landscapes. In summer and fall I am found on their shores holding a fishing rod, or on the surface being propelled by a paddle while sitting in my single most favourite invention of my ancestors, “the Kayak”. Nothing I have ever experienced compares to the feeling of oneness between my body and this perfect aquatic vessel. Some day in the hopefully near future, I will build my own kayak in a traditional way and further solidify my deepest connections with my ancestors. In the winter our lands become bigger, and more easily travelled by the solid-state of this life-giving liquid. I travel on the ice, I fish through the ice and, most of all, I hunt seals with my self-made Naulak (a harpoon) through the breathing holes made by seals. I am a part of these Northern waters. This mask-like representation of the Earth encompasses the parts of the world I love the most and need to protect. I love our Mother!

These features of the Earth alone aren't enough to give life. Instead, we need the pull of the Moon and the rays of the Sun.

My ancestors say: “The Moon is a man.” When viewing the night skies, it is often the combination of wispy translucent clouds, partially covering the pockmarked white disk in a haunting embrace, that we become fixated with his beauty. I needed to carve the **moon** in this state of ever-changing perfect light. He chases the Sun perpetually with a longing that can't and should never be. His pull spreads life's seeds through oceans and air. I love the Moon!

My ancestors say: “The Sun is a woman.” It's as though she is a giver of milk through rays of light, a wet nurse for our Earth, our Mother. She is needed for plant life. Without her waves of love, we become depressed, unless we find an alternate source of Vitamin D, and even then we long for her warmest of smiles. At times our Mother's dark clouds cover her love. The longer she's gone, the deeper we yearn for her. If we are lucky enough to be outside when the grey clouds break, we catch a glimpse of her grin in a way that drives our deepest appreciation for this yellow sphere of love. This is the **daytime scene** I've sculpted because this is the time I fully appreciate her. I don't think I'm alone. I love the Sun!

Now we have all the ingredients for life on Earth. Her sky, her lands, her waters, her moon, and her sun.

Of all the animals on this planet, the most important to my ancestors was and is the **seal**. Without this being of the sea, my ancestors would not have survived her harsh Northern landscapes, I would never have breathed her air, my daughter Chloe would never have been born, and my future descendants simply couldn't be. The seal is me! Their flesh becomes my flesh, their eyes become my eyes, their fat gives me the energy and the Vitamin D I need when the sun can't shine, and their Omega 3s maintain my brain and help me think more clearly. Everything I need to survive and thrive is encased in a luxurious pelt that became my ancestors' armour from the cold. I want to wear this armour so I look more like this most important animal that built me. I love the seal!

On the lower right of my sculpture is a relatively small carving of an **Inuk woman's face**. Her eyes closed, head slightly tilted as though at peace.

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She represents my ancestors. They were at peace because they listened to our ultimate Mother, from the moment their feet touched her frozen lands and waters, our Inuit lands, our Inuit Nunangat! When our expansive Mother spoke sternly, they quickly changed their ways to please her. The Earth provided our ancestors with a bible through her voice, and our culture was born through listening and obeying. I love our ancestors!

Unfortunately, most of humanity today does not listen anymore. Too many think she's [the Earth] simply just a big wet rock that we happen to be on, full of minerals, metals, and jewels meant to fill our greedy pockets. We are not just taking from the land, we are taking from our children's future, stealing from the future of humanity. Because of this, The Earth, Our Mother, is no longer speaking. Now she's yelling and screaming, and will continue to do so, louder and louder until we hear her voice and do as she says! She yells through floods, droughts, melting of ice caps, more intense hurricanes, tsunamis, uncontrollable forest fires—the list goes on and on! Her temperature is heating, like a mother with an angry red face! Eventually, if we don't act fast enough, she will get sick and tired of yelling and screaming. She will bury, burn, drown and starve us until we are next to nothing, or nothing at all! If I believed this is what "will" happen, I simply wouldn't carve anymore, wouldn't write, I wouldn't speak about this, and I would tell my daughter, "Humanity is hopeless, just take and enjoy while you can." I can't believe this! I won't believe this!

My daughter Chloe will have children if she wants, with my blessing, because we can fix what we've done, because we will fix what we've done! I love humanity! Prove you love humanity!

Stop handing your cell phones to your kids as a way to quiet them. Instead, talk with them, laugh with them, walk with them in nature or they will never know her voice and never receive her most beautiful gifts!

This last part is my favourite! It's my favourite because I love the look on children's faces after I share these most truthful words! Remember we all have an eternal inner child!

The key to unlocking every single question you could possibly ask is to listen and to understand that everything under the sun and above speaks. **EVERYTHING HAS A VOICE!** All the major failures of humanity come from greed. Never put yourself, your loved ones, or the over 8-billion living humans today on this planet above the countless generations that may be in the future. The generation that can realize and act on this will be the ones known to the rest of humanity as the greatest heroes on this planet! Almost every child wants to grow up to be a superhero, to save the world! We adults secretly want to be superheroes too! Do not take this from them and don't take this childlike truth from yourself! Now put on your invisible capes and save the world! And watch The Earth, Our Mother, Smile.

Image:

Billy Gauthier. **The Earth, Our Mother** (2023).

Carved fin whale skull bone,
approximately 56.5 x 81.5 x 30 inches.

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Collection of the artist.

Photo: Brian Ricks, courtesy of Bonavista Biennale.