

Sale Name: Important Indigenous Fine Art Auction Sept. 6th 2023

LOT 27 - Jessie Oonark - The Catch 26/30



Artist Description Jessie Oonark ᐱᑦᓴᓂᐅᓄᓇ (1917 – 1991 Indigenous / CAD) O.C., R.C.A. Oonark was born in 1906 near the Haningayok (Back River), Nunavut, an area known as the Barren Lands. She lived nomadically for the first 50 years of her life, involved in traditional pursuits such as processing and sewing animal hides to make clothing. These tasks would inform the subject and style of later artwork as well as instill a prodigious work ethic. In the 1950s, a decline in both caribou populations and the market for pelts caused a famine among her people. Oonark lost her husband and four of her twelve children to starvation. Along with hundreds of Inuit, Oonark and her family were relocated by the Canadian government to a permanent settlement in Qamani'tuaq (Baker Lake) in 1958. To support herself and her children, she worked various odd jobs including sewing, cooking and cleaning. Oonark had never made drawings before moving to Baker Lake at the age of 52. The story goes that Oonark saw some illustrations made by children and proclaimed that she could easily do better herself, and picked up the tools to prove it. Dr. Andrew Macpherson, a visiting biologist, saw the resulting drawings, and gave Oonark more materials. Over the ensuing years, the two swapped art supplies for art. Self-taught, her work also attracted the notice of members in both the Qamani'tuaq and Kinngait (Cape Dorset) artistic communities, giving her the opportunity to work with printmakers in both settlements. This is especially notable given that she did not live in Kinngait, and was the first non-resident to be accorded the privilege. Oonark was given a small studio and a stipend, allowing her to devote more of her time to creation. Wildly prolific and dedicated to her work, at times her output was around forty to fifty drawings per week, more than 100 of which were translated into prints for the annual Sanavik Cooperative Baker Lake Print Catalogue between 1970 and 1985. Her son, the artist William Noah, remembers her always working, at a loss to recall what his mother did for fun. He recalls that “there was always that determination to do every task to the very best of her abilities, and she told us we must do the same.” One of Oonark’s most recognizable images is a stonecut made in 1974, Big Woman. Highly sought after, one

print from this edition of 50 is held in the National Gallery of Canada's permanent collection.

Description

Stonecut 1984 26/30 - Puvirnituk Co-op

Titled, Numbered, Dated & Signed Across Lower Border

Sheet - 25 ins x 37 ins (63.5 cm x 94 cm)

Unframed

Provenance:

Baker Lake Chop

Private Collection

Quantity: 1



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