

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

LOT 84 - Jessie Oonark - Dream Of The Bird Woman 14/21



Artist Description Jessie Oonark ᐆᑦᑲᓯ ᐅᑦᑭᑦ (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. *Oonark's mother and father and her mother-in-law Naatak, were storytellers and these stories are richly represented in Oonark's work, such as the 1970 print entitled "Dream of the Bird Woman", referring to the Kiviuk (Qiviuk), an Inuk who faced dangerous obstacles in his journeys by kayak, which was described by Franz Boas as the most widely known Inuit legend in the circumpolar region. *Source Wikipedia

Description

Stonecut 14/21 - Puvirnituaq Co-op 1969

Titled, Numbered, Dated & Signed Across Lower Border

Sheet - 21 ins x 17 ins (53.34 cm x 43.18 cm)

Unframed

Provenance:

Baker Lake Chop

Private Collection

Quantity: 1



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