

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

LOT 38 - Pitseolak Ashoona - Many Winged Birds 10/50



Artist Description Pitseolak Ashoona ᐱᓕᓯᓱᐱ ᐱᓂᓱᐱ (1904 – 1983 Indigenous / CAD) C.M., R.C.A. Born on Nottingham Island in the Northwest Territories, now Nunavut. Her name means "sea pigeon" in Inuktitut. In 1922 (or 1923), Pitseolak married Ashoona, a hunter, in the Foxe Peninsula of Baffin Island. They had 17 children, though only six (Namoonie, Qaqaq, Kumwartok, Kiugak, Napachie, and Ottochie) lived with Pitseolak until adulthood. Some died in childhood, and others were adopted out according to custom, and raised by other Inuit families. Years of hardship followed the death of Ashoona, which occurred sometime in the early to mid 1940s. He died in the early years of the Second World War, a time of decline in the market for furs. Over time the loss of Ashoona led Pitseolak to become an artist. Making prints eased her loneliness and she described her art as what made her "the happiest since he died". Pitseolak's artwork later enabled her to support her family. Though her art arose from painful circumstances, it expressed mostly positive memories and experiences. As Christine Lalonde notes in *Pitseolak Ashoona: Life & Work*: "scenes of deprivation and suffering almost never appear in her drawings, though certain images convey sadness and longing" about the passing of Ashoona. Pitseolak is recognized as one of the first Inuit artists to create autobiographical works. Her art contained images of traditional Inuit life and contributed to the establishment of a modern Inuit art form, one that transmitted traditional knowledge and values while at the same time achieving worldwide popular and commercial success. She was also one of the first artists in the 1960s to make drawings for the print studio in Cape Dorset. She was a self-taught

artist. Initially Pitseolak worked sewing and embroidering goods for sale as part of the arts and crafts program. It was initiated by the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources as a way for Inuit to earn money. It was introduced by James Archibald Houston and Alma Houston at Cape Dorset in 1956. Upon seeing the work of her cousin Kiakshuk (1886–1966), who was part of the Cape Dorset graphic studio, Pitseolak decided to take up drawing. Her early work was well received and she soon became one of the most popular artists among those creating images for the Cape Dorset print collection. First working with graphite pencil, Pitseolak would later move on to coloured pencil and felt-tip pens. In the last two decades of her life, from 1960 onwards, she produced a collection of more than 7,000 images, 233 of which were created as prints in her Cape Dorset Collection. She said these illustrated life pre-contact, "the things we did long ago before there were many white men." Her artwork focuses on both daily life and legends, or Taleelayu. Pitseolak was inspired by other artists in her community who started before her, saying: "I don't know who did the first print, but Kiakshuk, Niviaksiak, Oshawetok and Tudlik were all drawing at the beginning. I liked the first prints ... because they were truly Eskimo." Pitseolak was accepted into the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1974 and was awarded the Order of Canada in 1977 for her work. Through the following decade and until her death in 1983, Pitseolak continued to draw, and to work with new media. An arts grant awarded to her in 1975 sparked experimentation in a new medium – acrylic paint on canvas. Initially, she approached painting like drawing, outlining in pencil and then filling in with colour. As she gradually adapted to the nuances of the medium, she began laying down bold colours side by side to achieve her vivid affect. In 1973 she narrated her story in the National Film Board's animated documentary *Pictures out of My Life*, directed by Bozenna Heczko and based on interviews from Eber's book. Pitseolak was also featured on a stamp, issued on March 8, 1993 and designed by Heather J. Cooper, in commemoration of International Woman's Day. Pitseolak's work has been featured in exhibitions at Canadian museums, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Canadian museum of civilizations, and the Vancouver Art Gallery. In 1975 she had a retrospective at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., organized by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. In 2020, Ashoona was one of eight finalist for the person to be depicted on \$5 polymer bills in Canada. Source: Wikipedia

Description

Stonecut & Stencil 10/50 - Dorset 1983

Titled, Numbered, Dated & Signed Across Lower Border

Sheet - 22 ins x 25.5 ins (55.88 cm x 64.77 cm)

Unframed

Paper: Natural

Provenance:

Private Collection

Quantity: 1



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