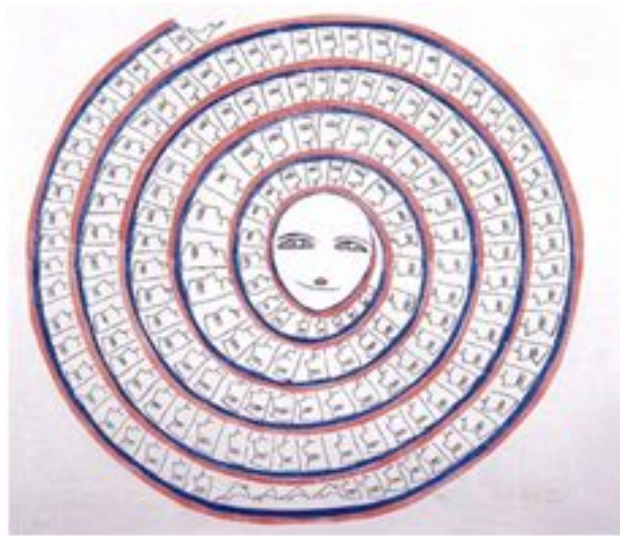


***Jessie Oonark's Artworks  
Very much alive***



***Guest curator: William Noah***

**Catalogue of the exhibition**

**LA  
GUILDE  
1906**

*William Noah wrote the biography of Jessie Oonark, as well as the short descriptive texts from this catalogue, related to the artworks chosen for this exhibition.*

## **Jessie Oonark**

Jessie Oonark (Onaq) was born in 1906 in the Chaney Inlet area. Her mother's name was Kilikvak and her father, Aglukkaq. Onaq's husband was named Jacob Qabloonaaq. Together they had thirteen children, most of whom were seamstresses and artists. Her son Josiah Nuilaalik was a carver. Her six daughters were all artists and made wall hangings. They were all hunters and trappers until death.

### **Drying Fish and The Catch**



*Jessie Oonark, Drying Fish, 1970, stonecut and stencil on paper, 20 x 25 in, printed by Barnabus Oosuah and Irene Taviniq Kaluraq, 14/50, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*



*Jessie Oonark, The Catch, 1984, stonecut and stencil on paper, 25 x 37 in, printed by Marjorie Esa, 23/30, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

Once people reached the all-summer camp in July or August, men took their pants off, keeping only their caribou skin jacket shirt on. Stepping into the strong, fast and deep currents, they started to stack big boulders up, and then made *haputii* (fish wire). Strong currents made it easier for big boulders to stand up. They would wait for white fish to enter their trap, close the entrance and then start spearing the fish with their *kakivak* (fish spears). Women had their own spot for capturing fish, and they crushed the heads of the fish with their teeth, throwing them onto dry land near the river bank. Afterwards, they would pull and carry catches up to the mainland by our campgrounds. They would filter hundreds of white fish, hanging them along rope lines. They made one parallel line up a small inukshuk to hold the rope line up. They also made very high domes in stone for fish storage, for the dogs' food and to age meat for human consumption in the long winter times.

## Innuit Katitput



*Jessie Oonark, Innuit Katitput (Gathering of Inuit), 1981, stonecut and stencil on paper, 18.5 x 25 in, printed by Peter Sevoga, Artist's Proof II/IV, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

Sometimes, Inuit families would gather after not having seen each other for a long time because of the long distances separating them. For example, my grandmother Kilikvak and my mother Oonark had not seen each other for so many years. Since my father took my mother as his wife, she had many children. After many years, my grandmother finally met her. It seemed like suddenly so many big families were living in one camp! My parents had never been interested in drum dance celebrations, but others, that we had never met, enjoyed these celebrations.

When big groups met, they would make a large igloo to celebrate and feast. Some, but not all of them, would exchange wives. I don't know much about this practise; but I have seen couples exchanging wives. *Innuit katitput* means a "big group of people got together". It can be interpreted in relation to the sharing of food for survival and to the generosity of some Inuit who were better hunters than others. Lastly, I interpret this print as a gathering of young Inuit who traveled to get together for sports or to find a new girlfriend or a boyfriend, and take them home to their community.

Now, people still travel and gather for different reasons. They meet to fundraise money to have church services in their community, with the new ways of worship. Some go to complete a training in arts and crafts in Cape Dorset, Nunavut, and couples live together. In Pangnirtung and Baker Lake, some people get married, coming from far away hamlet communities in our region, from mining camps or from cities. Nationalities are no longer a problem in today's generations. *Innuit katitput* meaning Inuit got together, it also means that they formed couples, on the second degree. Some break up and some are happy couples. There are a lot of broken homes, it's unfortunately a big issue.

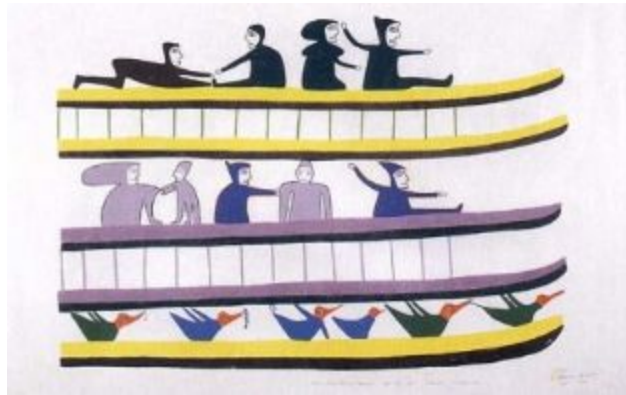
## Two Rooms Inside the Iglu



*Jessie Oonark, Two Rooms Inside the Iglu, 1982, stencil on paper, 22 x 30 in, printed by Nancy Kangeryuaq, Shop Proof, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

An igloo with two rooms is meant for the parents and their in-laws or for older family members, close families, who don't want to go out into the darkness or the blizzard to visit each other. It is so convenient for them to not have to go outside. One only needs to go across the room to visit others. It is especially practical for little kids visiting their grandparents. The best part of all is eating and sharing good food in one of the two rooms. Having two rooms helps in many ways: making clothing measurements, for kids to play together, to protect them, taking very good care of each other, doing chores, cleaning up... It mostly helps families learn from each other.

## Some Uses of the Qamotik



*Jessie Oonark, Some Uses of the Qamotik, 1983, stonecut and stencil on paper, 25 x 37 in, printed by Nancy Kangeryuaq, Artist's Proof II/IV, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

In the olden days, it was impossible to go anywhere without sleds; however, dog teams could travel anywhere. When the *qamotiks* had been left somewhere further out at the spring seasonal camp, our Dad would treat caribou legs or leg bones, wrapping them with some old caribou skin and freezing them. To freeze them, he would wrap and tie them with twine or homemade rope; then soak them in the water hole or make a big ice hole to wet and freeze them. He would then put harnessing on his dogs to travel to where he had left the wooden *qamotik*. He would come back later the same day. From that point on, he had such a convenient *qamotik* that he could travel far off or close by, as he pleased.

*Qamotiks* were used for hunting caribou or to find caribou caches, bringing family anywhere close to or far away from the settlement to get supplies. Long ago, our men knew how to make the best *qamotiks*, even to carry heavy loads; they were built solidly, whether the load carried was light or heavy. In the winter months, men put missing runners onto the *qamotik*, grinding and smoothing them until they shone and were solidly frozen. Then they moistened them using a piece of polar bear skin until the runners had a glassy shine and slid easily, running on the snow, avoiding rocks and bouncing on the ice of barren lakes. If a runner gets chipped, it would be mended right away. There are many ways of taking good care of a *qamotik*. When the weather warms up, caribou skin shades were attached on both sides of the *qamotik* in order to avoid melting and softening runners. At the end of their travels, men would then again make snow blocks in a long box shape to conceal the *qamotik* hides from the Sun. That last procedure was performed until steel runners were invented. The new generations now use plastic *qamotik* runners and travel by skidoo and Honda, and not so much with dog teams. In the summertime, we leave our *qamotik* sitting on the tundra until we need to use it the next fall season.

## The Fishmaker Made Kiviuk a Fish to Ride



*Jessie Oonark, The Fishmaker Made Kiviuk a Fish to Ride, 1981, stonecut and stencil on paper, 25 x 37 in, printed by Hattie Amitnaaq, Artist's Proof VI/VIII, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

In one of Kiviuk's journeys, he saw a man cutting small logs and as he threw the wood into the ocean, the logs turned into fish and swam away. Kiviuk started to approach him from behind, but saw that the man had a big hole through his anus and up to his mouth; Kiviuk could see the sky through this ghostly person. So he rushed to the man's side, claiming he approached him from his right side. The ghostly man raised his axe and aiming at Kiviuk asked him "which side of me did you come from?" Kiviuk kept repeating "I approached you from the right side." Then the man continued to chop pieces of wood. Kiviuk told him "I am looking for my wife and my two kids, I'm following them" - he meant goose and her two chicks. Kiviuk told the ghostly man he wanted to cross the Ocean. The ghostly man told Kiviuk to cover his ears because he would call loudly for a giant fish.

Following a loud call, something looking like a small island appeared. The ghostly man instructed Kiviuk to run, skip onto a rock and jump onto the back of the giant fish, when it approaches, and to then ride on it. The man said: "Every now and then, this giant fish will get jumpy. Every time it sees a white spot underneath, hang on; it will go really fast and wiggle. When it gets close enough to land, jump and run or swim onto the beach." Kiviuk followed the man's instructions. After a long voyage through the water, he saw a camp and walked up to it; as he approached, his two kids ran excitedly into one of the tents telling their mother "my Daddy's here"! The mother explained to them "we left him very far away, across the ocean, and he would never come." As Kiviuk walks into the tent, he discovers his wife already has a goose common-law husband. This other man was so surprised to see Kiviuk, he jumped out leaving his gutsy stomach behind; but he came back to retrieve it. So from that day on, Kiviuk has been living with his family. He had met all kinds of others who were bothersome to his wife and had to overcome them all.

## Three Fish

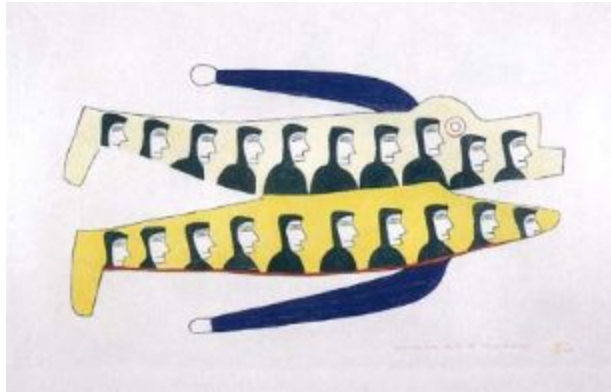


*Jessie Oonark, Three Fish, 1979, silkscreen on paper, 22 x 30 in, printed by Thomas Akuliaq Peryouar, 48/50, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

When ice fishing, there are usually three fish in each catch. This is accomplished by digging through the frozen lake. Jessie Oonark may have already caught three big fish in Back River, Nunavut. There are giant fish in that region; some in big lakes, in the smaller lakes and in the rivers as well. There are three big fish for the big family. We have to know the exact spots to catch nice ones.



## Strange Huge Inuk



*Jessie Oonark, Strange Huge Inuk, 1983, stonecut and stencil on paper, 24.5 x 37 in, printed by Hattie Amitnaaq, Artist's Proof I/IV, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

In a very short story, a giant man adopted an Inuk, who was the same size as us. The Giant and the Inuk were living on the land by the coastal areas. Before going to sleep, the giant man instructed his adopted son to wake him up when he sees polar bears approaching. His son agreed. The giant man fell asleep peacefully. The boy kept looking out for signs that the wild animal might be close by. Surely enough, he spotted a polar bear approaching them far in the distance, over the horizon. He quickly tried waking his giant adoptive Dad, but he wouldn't wake up. So the boy started hitting and cutting his big heel with an axe and the Giant finally woke up and asked what was going on. He told him "there's a big polar bear coming"! The giant saw the "polar bear" and told his son "it's just a little lemming". He might have killed it or he let it be. He then decided to go back to sleep...

Near Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, there is a big hill that is called *ovayuk*: a sleeping giant or a giant who fell down on its stomach onto the land.

## The Loving Couple



*Jessie Oonark, The Loving Couple, 1980, stencil on paper, 19 x 24 in, printed by Hattie Amitnaaq, 11/45, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

Future couples were arranged by each young man and young woman's parents when they were considered of age. Some Inuit women, even young women, were forced to get married and even dragged to be taken by a man. But later on in life, when the time came to fall in love, these couples didn't know what that was like. They had not seen each other for many years, but had, at some point, seen each other in the same camp. They were not allowed to touch each other even after having lived together for over a week. It all depended on whether they became comfortable together. It's no longer like that today.

## The People

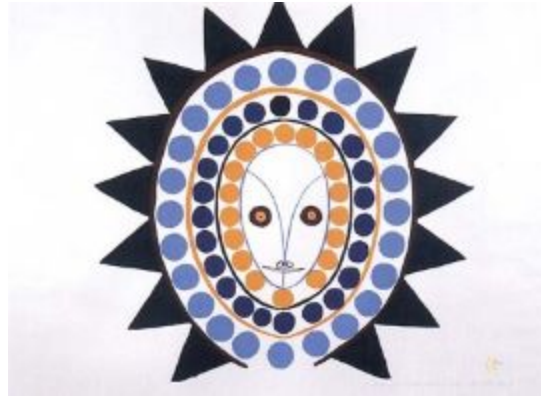


*Jessie Oonark, The People, 1985, stonecut and stencil on paper, 25 x 29 in, printed by Thomas Iksiraq and Martha Noah, Artist's Proof III/IV, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

*The People* is a drawing by Jessie Oonark (Onaq) printed by Thomas Iksiraq (1941- ). The second printmaker is named Martha Eloomegajuk Noah (1943- ). The creation of this artwork took lots of time and hard work. It takes a good attitude and much patience to

work many hours and weeks. In the centre, the big woman's face is the Mother of all People, up to now, from my generation to modern times.

### **Power of Thought**



*Jessie Oonark, Power of Thought, 1976, silkscreen on paper, 26 x 30 in, printed by William Ukpatiku, 54/58, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

You do not have to be a shaman or a reverend to have received powers. They are within you. If I know I will harvest today, it will happen, whether it is winter or summer. If I bless you and I mean it, it will happen. If I send my son to go fishing or hunting caribou, guiding him to a certain lake or to a specific hill, my mental power knows that there will be fish or animals at that place, although I have not yet been there. By wishing it to him, it will work.

If I make a hole in a particular spot, a big fish will always come there. Sometimes, I make a hole where there do not seem to be any fish and I pull out a big one or many more fish than I would have in other spots. If you bear a son as your newborn and you tell him to be a good harvester, it will work when the time comes. If it is a girl and you wish her to be the best seamstress, she will be when she is a young lady, and this character will manifest itself at a very young age.

Power of thought can also curse someone. Christians, shamans or anyone can curse another person for a short period of time or for the entire winter. If you believe in your thoughts, they shall be.

## Listening to the Birds



*Jessie Oonark, Listening to the Birds, 1982, stencil on paper, 22 x 31 in, printed by Irene Avaalaaqiaq Tiktaalaaq, 34/45, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

The best time of the year is when small birds and geese are migrating north in June, in the springtime. The best part is when the little birds are singing loudly, the sounds of the lapland longspurs on the tent, or when the birds descend and sing early on sunny mornings every day until, finally, they seem to disappear after mating. There are all kinds of birds: geese; sandhill cranes; ptarmigans and sometimes seagulls, who make the most noise. In the autumn, the geese heading south can be heard very high up in the sky or when they land somewhere not far away. In the middle of the summer, they don't make any sounds due to the incubation period. It's always enjoyable knowing there is life instead of quietness. Boys are proud when hunting ptarmigans, when they catch them for the first time.

## Hunting with Bow and Spear



*Jessie Oonark, Hunting with Bow and Spear, 1975, silkscreen on paper, 22 x 29.5 in, printed by William Noah, 10/49, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

Before rifles were brought up North, hunters made weapons out of caribou antlers or wood only when these materials were available. I think that in the summertime, it was easier to hunt with a bow and arrow, just before the beginning of the mating season. The hunter's main pride was that they would have plenty of food for their family, and also clothing to be made from caribou skins. For bedding, caribou skins were used as sleeping mats.

The preparation of skins represents a lot of work. To make leather, the skin had to be soaked for weeks at the small lake or pond; this makes the animal fur come off easily. Those were women's responsibilities. Even though the skins are almost dried, some families wrap themselves in the caribou skin at night. The human skin touching the animal skin helps it dry well overnight. This is followed by the stretching of the skin and scraping it over a few times. Finally, patterns are cut out and clothes are made by sewing the skins.

## Singing Northern Lights



*Jessie Oonark, Singing Northern Lights, 1985, stonecut and stencil on paper, 25 x 37 in, printed by Hattie Amitnaaq, 25/50, Constance V. Pathy Collection.*

In the calm quiet nights, late August or September, fall is the best time to observe the Northern Lights, when they come really close to campers. They can hear the hiss - a very quiet sound - as the lights dance around very close by. Long ago, on the land, we had a very developed sense of hearing before damages were caused by machines and airplane sounds. If someone whistled longly and quietly to the Northern Lights, they would come closer. When they got scared, Inuit would rub their fingernails rapidly and the Northern Lights would go away just as quickly.

There are different kinds of Northern Lights. Some years, the sky looks strange and foggy. The lights hover and seem really big, resembling foggy smoke. I think Inuit are afraid of those kinds of lights. End of November or early December, they seem to appear in the dead of the winter; I don't think we have explanations for those kinds. You would have to experience it once in a lifetime. We now live in the settlements and never spend time in the wilderness by the camp. Some nights, the lights seem scarier, leaving you with a weird evening feeling.