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For Immediate Use

Power of Thought: The Art of Jessie Oonark
Opens at the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History February 8, 2004

Jessie Oonark (1906–85) lived the nomadic existence that was typical of the Inuit in the Barren Lands of Canada until 1958 when, facing famine, she and hundreds of her people were relocated to Baker Lake, Nunavut, in Canada's Northwest Territories. Oonark, a self-taught artist then in her 50s, began drawing and later working with printmakers there, and from 1970 to 1985 produced the brilliantly colored stone-cut, silkscreen, and stencil prints highlighted in this exhibition.

'Power of Thought: The Art of Jessie Oonark'— on view at the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History from February 8 until May 30, 2004 — presents forty of Oonark's prints, as well as a selection of twelve drawings and five textiles by her, all of which explore and celebrate the life, land, mythology, and activities of Inuit culture. Her intuitive drawings and vibrant prints often are informed by her transformation from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle. With her knowledge of sewing, refined making clothes for her family and for sale, she adapted her design vocabulary to colorful, appliquéd and embroidered textiles.

Born near the estuary of the Back River region of the Canadian Central Arctic, Oonark experienced firsthand the major changes and crises faced by the Inuit during the twentieth century. In 1958 when caribou and other food sources became scarce, the Canadian government evacuated the Inuit population from the Back River region and took them to a permanent settlement in Baker Lake. To survive in this new, wage-based society, Oonark took on odd jobs such as sewing, cooking, and cleaning.

At Baker Lake she began drawing and then working with local printmakers, applying her traditional work ethic to creating hundreds of images, most depicting people and animals. A prolific artist, at times she would complete forty to fifty drawings in a week.

Strong central images and bold designs and colors characterize much of Oonark's work. Many of her creations reflect Oonark's preoccupation with the role and importance of women in Inuit society. The ulu, an essential, crescent-shaped knife used predominantly by women, appears repeatedly as a design motif symbolic of womanhood.

The title of this exhibition, 'Power of Thought,' comes from a same-named drawing and print created by Oonark in 1977 depicting a human face with geometric images radiating from it. The phrase

alludes to Oonark's inner vision as an artist: the invisible sphere of thoughts and ideas that she expressed most clearly through color, shape, line, and symbols. Oonark used this process of visual thinking to intellectualize and explore such metaphysical issues as being, identity, time and space—matters that concerned her as a woman and as an artist living in a time of tremendous social and cultural upheaval.

The nationally traveling exhibition of prints was organized by the Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond Museums. The Fowler has added drawings and textiles to the exhibition from the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, to tell a fuller story of this important Canadian artist.

Guest curated by Marie Bouchard, Canadian art historian, the exhibition features prints lent courtesy of Judith Varney Burch, Arctic Inuit Art, Nova Scotia, Canada. With the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Canada /avec l'appui du Ministère des Affaires étrangères et du Commerce international du Canada; the Canadian Consulate General, Los Angeles; Air Canada; the Yvonne Lenart Public Programs Fund; and private donors. A catalogue of the prints in the exhibition will be available in the Fowler Museum Store.

'Power of Thought' will be on view Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5 pm; and on Thursdays, noon until 8 pm. The museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. The Fowler Museum, part of UCLA's School of the Arts and Architecture, is located in the north part of the UCLA campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for \$7 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call 310/825-4361.

Programming:

Sunday, February 8, 2004, noon-5 pm

Opening Day

2 pm

Lecture by Marie Bouchard, Canadian art historian and guest curator of the exhibition Bouchard will trace how Oonark used a process of visual thinking to explore issues of being, identity, time and space. Program will be held in the Fowler's Harry and Yvonne Lenart Auditorium.

3-4:30 pm

Reception and Afternoon Tea

Hosted by the Canadian Consulate General, Los Angeles

Thursday, April 21, 2004 12:30-1 pm and 5:30-6 pm

Fowler in Focus

Betsy D. Quick, director of education, leads an in-gallery talk focusing on selected works in 'Power of Thought.'

Sunday, April 24, 2004 1-4 pm

Kids in the Courtyard Series: Printmaking

A printmaking workshop inspired by the work of Inuit artist Jessie Oonark.

Saturday, May 8, 2004 1-4 pm

A World of Art Family Workshop: Appliqué

Use layers of felt to make characters and images. FREE for members; \$5 material fee for non-members. Reservations required: 310/825-8655.

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