

**Great Art for
A Great University**

The University
College Collection



Great Art for A Great University:
The University College Collection

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Editors

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Foreword

Dennis Reid

Essay

Niamh O'Laoghaire

Cover: **John Edwin Usher** untitled [known as Burning College], detail

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The University College Collection

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The Woman Who Lives in the Sun,
1960

Stonecut on paper
41.91 x 49.53 (image)
Gift by bequest of Dorothy
Macpherson, 1995
UC273

Kenojuak Ashevak's *The Woman Who Lives in the Sun* is a stunning example of the stonecut printmaking practiced by Cape Dorset Inuit artists in the 1960s. Ashevak was born at Ikirasaq along the southern coast of Baffin Island in 1927. She married Johnniebo Ashevak in 1946, travelling with him to various Baffin-area fishing camps before settling at Etilliakjuk (approx. 56 kilometres east of Cape Dorset). After selling sewn and beaded works to the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative (WBEC), Kenojuak submitted her first drawings in 1959. Ashevak's *Woman* was one of 71 prints included in the 1960 Cape Dorset graphics annual collection released in the fall of 1961, an album assembled for sale to Canadian and international art dealers as a means of promoting Inuit art and generating revenue for the Cape Dorset community. *Woman* was produced in an edition of 50 copies, with 25 printed in orange-red ink and 25 in yellow. The process of printmaking at Cape Dorset at the time was truly collaborative, with Ashevak creating the initial drawings of a print, which were then sold to the Cooperative, traced onto a soapstone block, cut, inked, and printed by printmakers working in the WBEC workshop. Although *Woman* is credited to Ashevak, contemporary accounts and later interviews with the artist indicate that the print may have been based on sketches made by her artist husband Johnniebo Ashevak (1923-1972). *Woman* marked the second time a print attributed to Kenojuak Ashevak was chosen for inclusion in a Cape Dorset annual collection, and greatly increased her reputation

in the South and her commercial appeal as an Inuit artist.

The subject and form of the *The Woman Who Lives in the Sun* reflect Ashevak's interest in her natural surroundings, and prior skills in appliqué and sewn craft. Throughout the early years of her career, Ashevak focused on animal and natural figures inspired by her daily life in Etilliakjuk. Although in interviews Ashevak has said she does not depict specific legends or narratives in her work, the Inuit story of a brother and sister whose torches became the moon and the sun is a likely source of

the subject of *Woman*. The parallel lines below the mouth reference mouth-to-chin facial tattoos used throughout Arctic communities. Many of Ashevak's prints feature faces, primarily those of birds and women. Her contemporary print *The Enchanted Owl*, 1960 makes use of the same large, forward-facing eyes and nose (or beak) as here. Other elements are reused throughout Ashevak's oeuvre; the clean lines of the sun and its rays in *Woman* recall the neat seams and edges of fabric appliqué practice, in which solid pieces of fabric were used to create shapes. *Woman* is exceptional

among Ashevak's works, in that it features a single, central figure unadorned by any decorative marks or lines. Her later prints made use of patterned forms and markings to create a rhythm of shapes which fill the page. *Woman* is an early incarnation of this use of pattern, as the rays of the sun create an undulating form which fills the paper. The print includes a signature block on the lower right-hand side which includes the syllabic Inuktitut names of the artist and printmaker (in this case Lukta Kiakshuk), and the red igloo symbol of the WBEC printmaking workshop. AL

