

Indigenous Matrix: Northwest Women Printmakers

Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing today, silkscreen prints have been created and used in Northwest Coast Native communities as potlatch gifts, historical documents, and a means of expressing stories, culture, and creativity. The growth and professionalization of the medium has created a strong market, thus engendering more economic freedom for many artists. In the early days, printmaking was dominated by male artists, often carvers, but in the last two decades more women artists have contributed their own passion and artistry to the medium's development.

A “matrix” in the printmaking process is the object used to hold the ink that is then pressed onto the paper. Passing along intergenerational stories and cultural practices, these Indigenous women printmakers are the matrix of their culture and, as matriarchs, are keepers of special types of knowledge. They uphold their communities' values and transfer their wisdom to the next generations of Native artists. This gallery presents the works of two prominent artists, Susan Point and Francis Dick, and a selection of stonecut prints by four Inuit artists: Angotigolu Teevee, Jessie Oonark, Myra Kukiiyuat, and Pitseolak Ashoona.

Susan Point, Musqueam Artist

A member of the Musqueam First Nation, Susan Point is a world-renowned artist masterful in many mediums: printmaking, jewelry making, carving, and sculpture. Using color in ways not typically seen in traditional Coast Salish art and drawing inspiration from the stories of her ancestors, Point brings fresh perspectives to visualizing the histories and cultures of the Coast Salish peoples.

From the time when I pulled silkscreens on my kitchen table, I have stayed the course because my family helps me. All of my children are artists, and my grandchildren are too. I am obliged to lead them by example—Coast Salish art has forever been a way to honour and remember significant details of our social lives. My hope is that my children remember to tell not only our cultural accounts, but also their own stories as well. —Susan Point

Francis Dick, Dzawadā'enuxw Artist

Francis Dick is a multidisciplinary artist from Yális (Alert Bay) and a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw, Dzawadā'enuxw peoples. Her emotionally and culturally powered images speak to the continuance and strength of Indigenous women and their roles as matriarchs and culture-bearers. She produces innovative compositions in Northwest Coast Native style that challenge some of the rules of traditional form and vibrantly express personal experiences, social issues, and cultural values.

Before anything else, my work is about honouring my life process, my journey through my fires, from places of pain and darkness to places that I might stand in my truth; my work is not a career, it's a way of life. —Francis Dick

Inuit Women and Printmaking Cooperatives

Highly renowned in the printmaking medium, Inuit women receive high acclaim and have been exhibited both locally and globally since the inception of Canadian government–supported art cooperatives in the Arctic beginning in the 1960s. Each of the artists included in this exhibition—Angotigolu Teevee, Jessie Oonark, Myra Kukiiyuat, and Pitseolak Ashoona—are pioneers in printmaking, having developed personal styles and iconographies and served as mentors for subsequent generations of women artists. Drawing upon their skills in sewing and decorating traditional skin clothing, the artists translate symbols and stories in unique and innovative ways to stone and linoleum block prints for sale to the public and now a primary means of economic growth for Arctic communities.

Spirit Bird, n.d.

Stoneblock print

Angotigolu Teevee

Canadian, Inuit, Cape Dorset, 1910–1967

Gift of the John Henry Hauberg Family, 2003.131

The Dragon, 1996

Silkscreen print

Francis Dick

Canadian, First Nations, Kwakwaka'wakw, Dzawada'enuxw, born 1959

Gift of Simon Ottenberg, 2009.5.11

Raelene, 1999

Silkscreen print

Francis Dick

Canadian, First Nations, Kwakwaka'wakw, Dzawada'enuxw, born 1959

Gift of Simon Ottenberg, 2014.4.7

I noticed you from afar, always standing outside of my periphery, the most amazing beauty, so quickly I would turn away. Your eyes most haunting, calling to me, so familiar from lifetimes ago. Who are you? And why do I remember you ... The calling is closer and the whispers clearer, I am so drawn to you. And when we meet, without thought I listen, watch and inhale your place where you breathe from, and I am so indescribably moved inside myself from a place that has not ever been touched. Only through the highest honour that I know, I knew that I had to paint the way I feel, my love, my fascination, my appreciation, my gratitude that you are you and I was able to listen. —Francis Dick

Child to Mother, 1997

Silkscreen print

Francis Dick

Canadian, First Nations, Kwakwaka'wakw, Dzawada'enuxw, born 1959

Gift of Simon Ottenberg, 2014.4.8

*Weep for me not my heart gone one
Who flew from me as an eagle to the moon
Can you come to love me, if only for one day
Hold me to your bosom, close, so I
Might feel your heart
Beating love, wisdom and light upon my
Tiny bod
Will you mother come to me,
And take my baby pain away
Fill me with what was stolen from me, time and time again
See that moon, just over there, rising from the sea,
Meet me there my mother dear, embrace me 'til
I'm free, from all the shadows dancing round, flailing,
Brawling with deathly sound,
So come my mother, please, for just a while.
Yes,
Over there, you see that moon rising from
The sea,
Meet me there my mother, please,
Embrace me towards eternity. —Francis Dick*

Galadzi, 2003

Silkscreen print

Francis Dick

Canadian, First Nations, Kwakwaka'wakw, Dzawada'enuxw, born 1959

Gift of Simon Ottenberg, 2014.4.9

Dick created *Galadzi* during a period of longing for home and family while she was living in the Kootenays. Channeling these feelings, she spent her time reflecting on the summer she spent at the original village of the Nimpkish River on Vancouver Island. It was there she saw the seasonal return of the sockeye, heard distant voices and laughter of children in the Kwakwaka'wakw language, and listened at night to the noises of an unseen canoe.

The Great Bear symbolizes the spirit of the ancestors that Dick reminisced about during her stay in the Kootenays. It is shown hunting the salmon that annually return to the river Gwani (Nimpkish River).

Galuda, n.d.

Silkscreen print

Francis Dick

Canadian, First Nations, Kwakwaka'wakw, Dzawada'enuxw, born 1959

Gift of Simon Ottenberg, 2014.4.10

Certain families of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples perform a dance of seagulls, in part referencing the ubiquitous shore birds. A cedar head-ring is placed around the seagull's neck, denoting status and supernatural power. Situated on a rock formation overlooking coastal waters, this seagull is a tribute to the Alert Bay peoples and their recently built canoe, Galuda.

Walking Through My Fires, 1992

Silkscreen print

Francis Dick

Canadian, First Nations, Kwakwaka'wakw, Dzawada'enuxw, born 1959

Gift of Simon Ottenberg, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2014.8.9

Wondering, 2000

Silkscreen print

Francis Dick

Canadian, First Nations, Kwakwaka'wakw, Dzawada'enuxw, born 1959

Gift of R. Bruce and Mary-Louise Colwell, 2018.29.41

Drum Dance, 1974

Stonecut Print

Myra Kukiiuat

Canadian, Inuit, born Baker Lake, 1929–2006

Gift of the John Henry Hauberg Family, 2003.132

Little Circle, 1973

Stonecut Print

Jessie Oonark

Canadian, Inuit, born Chantrey Inlet, 1960–1985

Gift of the John Henry Hauberg Family, 2003.133

Oonark is hailed as one of the greatest artists to have come from the Baker Lake artistic cooperative. Spending the first fifty years of her life within Utkusiksalingmiut camps near the Haningayok (Back River) region, she spent much of her creative talents processing and sewing caribou and sealskin to produce clothing. Much of this early sewing work of Oonark's informed how she would approach the printmaking medium. The isolated and fragmented forms in her pieces, come together to form bold imagery of Inuit life.

Night Owl, 1967

Stonecut Print

Pitseolak Ashoona

Canadian, Inuit, born Nottingham Island, worked in Cape Dorset, ca. 1905–1983

Gift of the John Henry Hauberg Family, 2003.143

One of Cape Dorset's most renowned female printmakers, Pitseolak's work is reflective, depicting the traditional Inuit ways of life. Born into a seminomadic way of life, she spent her early years throughout southern Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin Island) before settling in Cape Dorset. She developed a comprehensive knowledge of the landscape of these areas, which informed her later works such as *Night Owl*.

Connections, 2005

Soft ground etching

Susan Point

Canadian, First Nations, Musqueam, born 1951

The Point Family, Musqueam, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2007.46.2

Connections, 2005

Soft ground etching

Susan Point

Canadian, First Nations, Musqueam, born 1951

The Point Family, Musqueam, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2007.46.12

Discovery, 1995

Serigraph

Susan Point

Canadian, First Nations, Musqueam, born 1951

The Point Family, Musqueam, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2007.47

Southwind with Mountain Beaver Woman, 2004

Serigraph

Susan Point

Canadian, First Nations, Musqueam, born 1951

The Point Family, Musqueam, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2007.52

The fishing weir story is a Duwamish oral history explaining the yearly cycle of Northwest winters. Northwind and Southwind led their villages at opposite points of the Duwamish River—both vied for Mountain Beaver Woman's attention. Mountain Beaver Woman chose Southwind, upsetting Northwind and his people, who resided along the lower river. In response, Northwind and his people attacked Southwind's village, resulting in its collapse. He took Mountain Beaver Woman, pregnant with Southwind's child, hid her mother on top of a mountain, and held the land underneath his power, coating the landscape with ice and snow and placing an ice weir in the river so that fish could not swim upstream to spawn.

Northwind Returns, 2004

Serigraph

Susan Point

Canadian, First Nations, Musqueam, born 1951

The Point Family, Musqueam, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2007.57

Mountain Beaver Woman's child, Stormwind, was raised by Northwind's village and warned to stay away from the mountain. One day, he disobeyed and discovered the old woman, who told him the story of his mother. Troubled by the story, he stayed with his grandmother, who wove baskets, and prepared his revenge against Northwind. They filled the grandmother's basket with rain and poured many basketfuls down the mountain, flooding the valley, breaking Northwind's ice weir, and sending it and him down the river into the sea (Puget Sound). Now, Northwind is permitted to visit Mountain Beaver Woman only a few months out of the year, announcing his return with the cold winter season.

Peripheral Visions - Salish Footprint, 2006

Serigraph

Susan Point

Canadian, First Nations, Musqueam, born 1951

The Point Family, Musqueam, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2007.58

Using traditional Salish elements and forms, Point emphasizes the Salish connection to the land and the footprints the Salish people leave in their currently occupied traditional territories. Depicting the different figures that hold importance in the region—whales, salmon, humans, eagles, and more—this piece serves as an important reminder of the tangible and intangible histories and cultures that reside here, yesterday, today, and always.

Eagle Plate, ca. 2001

Etched Glass

Susan Point

Canadian, First Nations, Musqueam, born 1951

Gift of R. Bruce and Mary-Louise Colwell, 2019.3.8

Four Ravens, 2004

Silkscreen Print

Susan Point

Canadian, First Nations, Musqueam, born 1951

Gift of R. Bruce and Mary-Louise Colwell, 2019.3.16

Spirit of a Warrior, 1986

Silkscreen Print

Susan Point

Canadian, First Nations, Musqueam, born 1951
Gift of R. Bruce and Mary-Louise Colwell, 2018.29.108