



Pitseolak, **Perils Of The Sea Travelers**. Stone cut, 18 x 24, 1960

Pitseolak shows herself in a gay dream sequence as the small central figure in a sealskin woman's boat. She is accompanied by a harpooner and two creatures from the other world. A kayakman is towed behind the boat. The three humans are surrounded by sharp toothed beasts and a mountain spirit. The sea beasts snarl and devour a seal and a man while the mountain spirit cunningly disembowels a dwarf and a two headed wolf.

Eskimo art must surely owe its original debt to the religion of Shamanism. A generation ago the Eskimos were governed by their daily relationship to an immense and awesome spirit world that remains almost incomprehensible to us. The small crudely carved amulets once worn in the clothing have almost disappeared. The amulet figures of animals and humans were intended to establish

a kind of sympathetic magic between the hunter and his prey. Today, more than half of the prints, like the amulets, still draw their inspiration directly from the sources of Shamanism. The printed images we see are reflections of these old traditions that slowly fade before them. Christian intrusions and standardized education on every side will undoubtedly see the death of this ancient religion.

It is difficult today to imagine the future of Eskimo carving or printmaking. The Arctic world is currently undergoing drastic change and there has not as yet been time to judge the effects of this transition. The new Federal day schools, improved medical services, the gathering of families into small permanent communities, and many other changes will alter the lives of the people. Perhaps their lives will be altered for the better, but the changes are not likely to improve their art.

Here's one measure of the impact of Eskimo art: The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York now has a show of *fifty centuries* of great art, and *three* contemporary Canadian Eskimo carvings are shown. But these people had never met or heard of anybody interested in "art", and they don't really give a hoot if their things are in the Metropolitan. But they do like appreciation, especially from the white man. After all, they think, anyone who can make a rifle with an action like that can't be all dumb. Maybe we'll feel the same when we see what they do.

Eskimos have many important things to tell us, ideas about life. But we go on as always, advising them in a voice so loud we cannot hear

them. This is exactly what we did with the Indian people, on both sides of the border, while priceless cultures slipped away.

Suggested Reading and Films

Birket-Smith, K. A. J. Vol. 5, *The Caribou Eskimos*. Copenhagen, 1940.

Carpenter, Edmund S. "Ivory Carving of the Hudson's Bay Eskimo." *Canadian Art*, Vol. 15/3, August, 1958.

Gimpel, Charles. *Canadian Eskimo Art*. Abbot Hall Gallery, Kendal, England, 1963.

Himmelheber, Hans. *Eskimokunstler* (Alaska). Strecher u. Schröder, Stuttgart, 1938.