

Have You Met Jessica Park?

SEPTEMBER 7, 2023 BY MONICA GORDON-PERSHEY

Not quite 20 years ago, while visiting the Yale University Art Gallery, I happened upon a brightly colored, dazzlingl



The house painting by Jessica Park that I first saw while visiting the Yale University Art Gallery

y detailed painting of a house. Such a simple subject for a painting, but seen through the creative eyes of Jessica Park, whose fame as an artist with autism was growing internationally, the house almost pulsed with life. That is where I met Jessica Park.



Painting by Jessica Park. Her artwork often features her vision of buildings, bridges, machine controls, and the night sky.

Jessica’s story is well known. An Internet search yields dozens of hits describing her life, her artwork, and the many articles, books, and videos about her. Most notably, since 2004, [The Jessica Park Project at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts](#) has been dedicated to the display, publication, and study of her work.

Challenging the Medical Community in the 1960s

Jessica’s mother, [Clara Claiborne Park](#), is famous for being one of the first parents to advocate fiercely for her

child with autism, at a time when the word “advocacy” was hardly known and certainly not a common role for parents. Her book, *The Siege*, was published in 1967 when Jessica was about nine years old and remains [one of the most important memoirs](#) of a parent’s struggle to have her child properly diagnosed and given the opportunity to thrive.

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*Embracing a perspective that was decades ahead of her time, Clara took pride in her daughter’s neurodiversity*

Monica Gordon Pershey

In 2021, the historian Marga Vicedo published [Intelligent Love: The Story of Clara Park, Her Autistic Daughter, and the Myth of the Refrigerator Mother](#), which describes how the Parks challenged the medical establishment and fought for Jessica to be educated, included, valued, and encouraged to develop her extraordinary talent. Embracing a perspective that was decades ahead of her time, Clara took pride in her daughter’s neurodiversity. She referred to Jessica’s “enthusiasms,” meaning her visual curiosity about common objects such as radios, clocks, dials, houses, buildings, and bridges, as well as constellations and starry skies. Allowing Jessica to explore her own fascinations laid the foundation for her unique painting style to develop.

From what I have read online, it appears that Jessica currently lives independently with the assistance of her siblings and continues to paint and exhibit her art. I hope this post will lead you to an exploration of Jessica’s life and work.

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