

# **Pioneering Art Mission**

**COLLEGE**—A young Eskimo artist of the University of Alaska took off for the village of Wainwright on a pioneering mission.

Melvin Olanna, an instructor in the University's Arts and Crafts Extension Program, has 24 visits scheduled before the end of March in a project aimed at helping Alaskan artists improve the quality of their work, become more efficient at producing art objects and raise the economic level of the villages.

The State Department of Vocational Education provided the funding—\$25,900 until June 30. Olanna, with perhaps a second touring artist joining the program on March 1, will spend periods of two or three weeks in the field.

Periodically he will be back on the campus at College for a week, reporting his findings and recommendations to members of the art department and officials of the University's Division of Statewide Services.

"Melvin is a freewheeling person dreaming up ideas as he goes along," remarked Associate Professor Ronald W. Senungetuk who is director of the Extension Center in Arts and Crafts and for three years Olanna's teacher.

"I would like to see Mel come back with an accurate record of what's out in the villages," said Stanley Zielinski, acting head of the University's Art Department. "I'd like to see through Mel's eyes what the potential is."

They offered suggestions at the first meeting of a new Advisory Committee to the Arts and Crafts Extension Training Program for Alaska Village Artists, appointed by Dr. Charles W. Lafferty, director of the Division of Statewide Services.

He had written letters to members of the Village Councils at Wainwright, Point Hope and Kivalina, which were to be visited before December 5th.

He noted that Professor Senungetuk, "a native Alaskan with an international reputation in the field of art", would generally supervise the training program for art craftsmen in the villages, with Olanna as the program instructor.

"We are not going out as the University of Alaska imposing our will on the villages," Dr. Lafferty told advisory committee members, "but as helping them better what they are al-

ready doing."

"Great good can come of it," commented Dr. William R. Wood, president of the University. "Our intent is to help village artists and craftsmen improve their work and their in-

Dr. Wood said that the village art production now consisted largely of art objects made of various materials and objects for personal adornment.

He urged consideration of a third concept—"industrial art—kitchen utensils, pottery, designs for clothing, textiles, furniture, anything used around the home or office." He added:

"That's where you can get into mass production. You can turn them out by the hundreds and thousands. But quality control is essential."

Olanna took with him on his first trip examples of work in silver, marble, soapstone, rosewood, cherrywood and other materials, along with films. Now "28 or 29" years old, he was originally an ivory carver when he began making a living as an artist at 15.

"I'll show these items and let the artists choose their own materials," he related.

Professor Senungetuk said that in Wainwright Olanna would find two or three persons interested in woodcuts who now were doing "some drawings on baleen, a substance growing from the upper jaw of a whale.

Two or three others, he added, were doing carving using the whale's jawbone. Point Hope was interested in setting up a little shop and wanted help.

Olanna, he said, would "take a look at caribou hooves for jewelry," a onetime practice that might be revitalized.

Gerald Hiley of the State Department of Vocational Education asked whether the procedure would be setting up a "one of a kind" type of craft or, would mass production be emphasized?

Professor Senungetuk said both might be done, at least on a small scale.

"Melvin knows how to make a 'one of a kind' piece and also set it up for production on a larger scale," he added.

Olanna interjected:

"The average craftsman can make three pairs of good quality ear rings in an eight-hour day. I can teach them to make 12

pairs, and of better quality."

He remarked with a smile that "one thing I have thought of is designing sealskin clothes—miniskirts with matching vests" and ivory buttons.

Olanna, born in the village of Shishmaref and raised at Ikpik, attended Santa Fe's Institute of American Indian Arts in 1961, later enrolled at the University of Alaska and in the summer of 1969 was resident artist and instructor at a boys' camp near White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia.

Among examples of his present output are miniature Eskimo dance masks mounted in silver pendants, and large soapstone sculptures that draw on themes of Eskimo culture.

Professor Senungetuk, a native of the Eskimo village of Wales, Alaska, on the Seward Peninsula and a faculty member here since 1961, is a former Fulbright scholar at Oslo, Norway.

He spent his undergraduate years at the School for American Craftsmen of the Rochester (New York) Institute of Technology. With silver jewelry his prevalent art work, he is also interested in graphic designing and woodworkring.