

"Survival" from New Jersey to Anchorage

BY MARGIE BAUMAN

• An Alaskan Eskimo exhibit emphasizing survival techniques which have carried the culture through thousands of years

opens July 2 at the Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum and will run through Aug 13.

"Survival: Life and Art of the Alaskan Eskimo," is a tri-

bute to the adaptability of the first people of the Alaskan arctic, sponsored jointly by the Newark Museum, Newark, N.J., and the American Federation of Arts.

Anchorage is the fifth city to show the exhibit, which first opened in Newark in March, 1977.

"The people here loved it," said Barbara Lipton, special projects consultant for the Newark Museum and director of the survival project.

"The show was a real revelation to them. One of surprise and one of delight. The people were surprised things were so beautiful," she said.

Lipton, who is now researching a documentary film on Alaska Eskimos, said the exhibit helped clear up a number of misconceptions about the Alaskan Eskimo lifestyle, including one that all Eskimos live in igloos.

"The reaction was a positive one," said Lipton, who said she was impressed with the Eskimo tendency to adapt and "the inner will to survive."

Survival, in the context of the exhibit, is defined by Lipton as "the survival of the Eskimo people in a difficult and often hostile environment, survival of a culture and a continuing way of life, lasting over thousands of years into the present day; and now, the threat to survival of this ancient people and their traditions from the impact of modern society that is rapidly encroaching upon even the most remote regions of Alaska."

Lipton's commentary on Eskimo survival is also contained in a colorful booklet, bearing the same name as the exhibit and featuring an interview with Barrow Artist Lawrence "Larry" Ahvakana.

"It seems evident that the changes now occurring in Alaska are affecting much more than the traditional material culture of the Eskimos," Lipton concludes in her report.

"Side by side with the onslaught upon the underlying foundations of their society, however, there is emerging a new

reaffirmation of self, not exactly in the old image but no longer content to follow the white man's path. The Eskimo, adaptable through his thousands of years old history to the demands his environment and life have placed upon him, will undoubtedly emerge from this period of accelerated change an altered but proud representative of a viable people. It is impossible to predict the direction the Eskimo's cultural adaptation will take," she said.

"His own heritage of survival in the Arctic and his own perception of life will shape his future. If art can be considered as a statement of man's inner self and his culture, then Eskimo art will also adapt itself to the Eskimo's self-image and new way of life. In the long run, the only valid answer to the question what does it mean to be an Eskimo? may be to consider oneself an Eskimo, and that will be definition enough."

Exhibit Shows Variety

The "Survival" exhibit includes a number of items from the collections of the Newark Museum and some on loan from other public and private collections. There are ivory carvings, ceremonial masks, sculptures, paintings, prints, household articles, dolls, tools, weapons and costumes. Carvings in ivory, wood and stone by contemporary Alaska Eskimo artists are also included. Featured artists include Larry Ahvakana, Nick Wongitillin, St. Lawrence Island; Lincoln Milligrock, Nome; George Ahgupuk, Anchorage; Bernard Katexac, Nome, and Carl Hank Sr., Barrow.

An audio-visual show accompanying the exhibit highlights contemporary Alaskan Eskimo life and problems. Slides and taped interviews with Alaskan Eskimos tell about traditional and evolving modern lifestyle.