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# Special Publication Extols Alaskan Eskimo Artistry



By THOMAS RICHARDS, JR.  
Staff Writer

*THE PAST* is painted a distant blue. It is not the brilliant blue of the noonday heavens. Nor is it the fathomless blue of

the crystallized twilight sky.

*IT IS* the blueness of ice-fogged clouds on a frozen lagoon. A blueness which is within our people of our race, yet which is one we cannot define. We

know of it only what a great grandparent learned from a great grandparent.

*IT IS* the blueness of yet-pale berries, which of themselves only

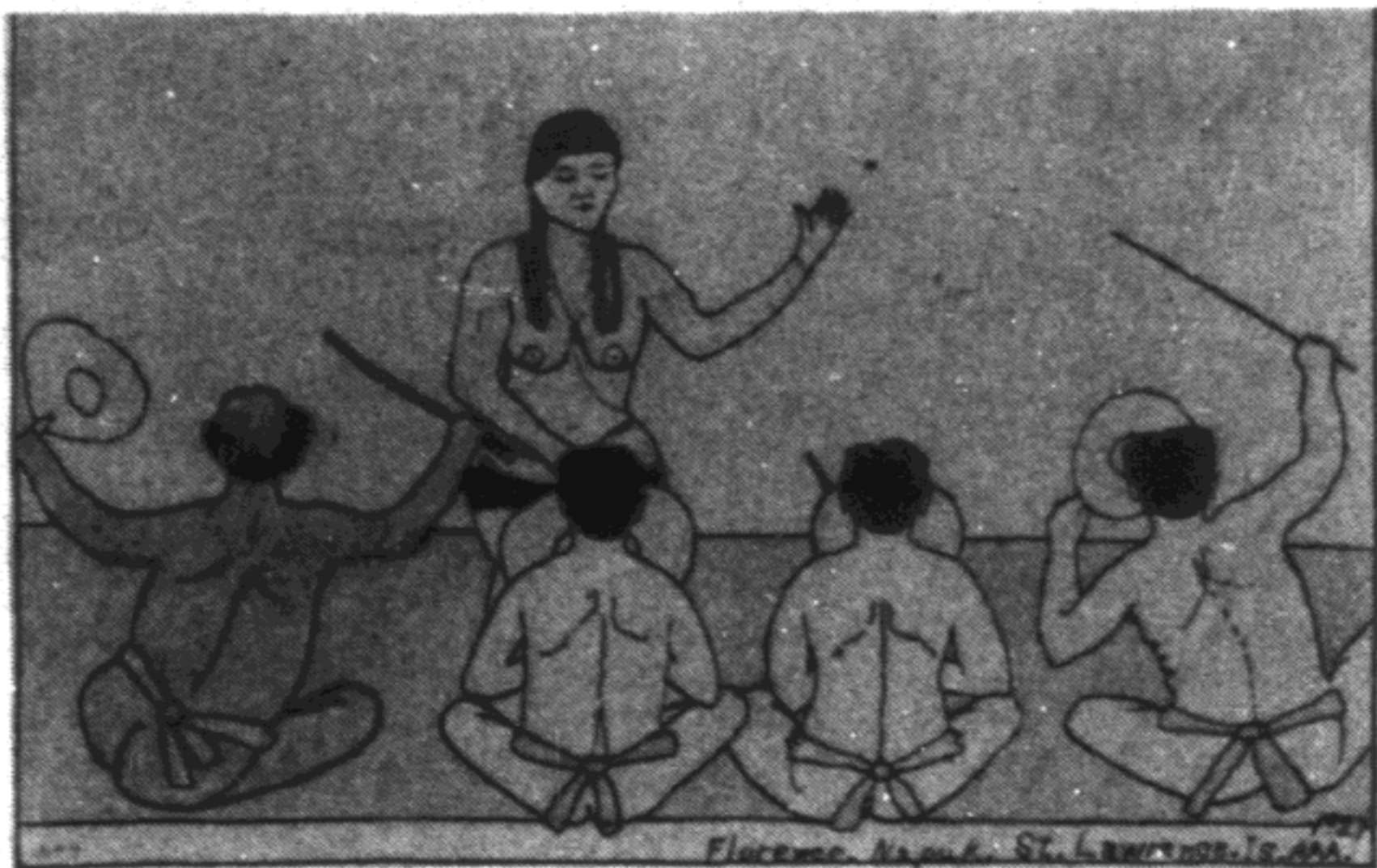
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knew of serving the people as one part of the harvest from a much harvested land.

IT IS NOT the steel blueness in the bright eyes of the invaders. It is the blue of which we are not totally aware, and so unaware that it becomes a more faint blue, and a more romantic blue.

OUT OF this blue came our people. We know not why, but only that we did and only that it is mostly gone.

THE NEAR-WHITE beluga had a touch of this blueness as he flashed his back and marked his path from the salty green of the sea into the fresh blue-grey sound.

WHITE and black spots highlighted this blueness as they mingled together on the shell of the cliff bird's egg.

FLOWERS WAVED this blueness to the wind above the nearly noticed graves of countless ancestors—fathers and mothers to our race. . .

This excerpted essay may well explain the desire the Alaskan Native has to learn more of his past and his people, and to tie himself more closely to his heritage.

In reviewing the second volume of Native American Arts, a publication especially prepared for the Seventh Tundra Times Banquet, one can begin to realize how very much the Eskimo can value the culture and particularly the art of his people.

"Graphic Arts of the Alaskan Eskimo" by Dorothy Jean Ray, abundantly illustrated with its ninety-one photographs, summarizes Eskimo art with consideration of pre-historic native graphic arts through application of those traditional forms by contemporary Eskimo artists.

Published by the Interior Department's Indian Arts and Crafts Board, the introduction to the special volume was authored by Chairman Vincent Price.

Price said, "... it is general ignorance of the Eskimo's achievements that tends to make even well wishers shrug off active responsibility to inspire and accept and support native arts and crafts.

"For the first time, in this book we can follow the development of the Eskimo graphic arts in Alaska, and we have as our guide the best kind of expert in Dorothy Jean Ray. Not only does she know her material first hand, delving back into the past to bring into focus modern techniques and designs, but she has a deep reverence for the creative spirit of the people.

"... Like American Indians, Eskimos are anxious to keep a firm, but unstultifying grip on the heritage and to carry it through the arts into the present where it is very much needed by them and by their non-Eskimo brothers for matters of prideful identification of both.

"... Eskimo art is simplicity itself. It is the uncomplicated statement of observation, wedded to sensitivity, uncluttered by technical erudition. It may be among the last pictorial truths of human adult, yet it is never childish, for its directness negates any

coyness. It is the literal visual history of the people, rather than their imaginatively manipulated tales, and as such requires from the novice viewer an honesty of looking that sometimes does not come without honest effort."

Although Dorothy Jean Ray cannot be categorized as a novice viewer, it is evident that she has made this honest effort to achieve honesty of looking.

The publication can well be expected to receive wide acclaim as the best collection of Alaskan Eskimo art available, and truly deserves such recognition.

Mrs. Ray, rather than presenting thin descriptions of one aspect of Alaskan Eskimo culture, explores the contributions of the individual artists to the unique field of Eskimo graphic arts.

There is no tone of disrespect. There is no indication that she has attempted to evaluate the intelligence of a long dead people. She recognizes the right of a people to be different. And she recognizes the right of the Eskimo artist, as well as in his work, to contribute now and in his own way.

She reflects on Kakarook, who used watercolors and crayon in his drawings: "The ability of the Alaskan Eskimo artist to express many distinctive characteristics of human beings economically and in miniature has always been impressive, and Kakarook's representations of human beings is truly unique. With an eye to eliminating all essentials, and with several well-placed strokes of the brush he conveys action, posture, and personality of every tiny figure."

Mrs. Ray also has respect for

those, such as George Ahgupuk and Robert Mayokok, who first began to work in other materials than ivory: "Mayokok and others like him may not be great artists in our terms, but by following an old Eskimo tradition, they have attended to the difficult job of living in a new world with dignity and without complaint."

Saddened that Eskimo art has not won wide recognition, Mrs. Ray writes, "most so-called Eskimo art is sold to tourists in Alaska, and their favorite souvenir is ivory."

She has admiration for the new breed of Eskimo artists. She reveals an admiration for Joseph Sunungetuk, who works with prints; for Ronald Sunungetuk, who encourages his Eskimo students to explore new media; and for Bernard Katexac:

"Katexac has fulfilled the confidence in his ability by his refreshing interpretations of traditional Eskimo subjects. His black and white engravings and etchings are dramatic, and his woodcuts make a daring and colorful departure from the older, conservative black and white graphics in ivory and drawings, and from the low-key contrasts in skin drawings."

In these younger artists, in which group she places Melvin Olanna who will host a one-man show during the Tundra Times banquet, Mrs. Ray sees "abundant indication that the younger Eskimos have not abandoned an old tradition, but on the contrary, are seizing upon it with greater vigor than ever before."

This publication is not the first for Dorothy Jean Ray. Her first book on Alaskan Native artists, "Artists of the Tundra and the Sea" was published in 1961 and established Mrs. Ray as a serious student of native art.

"Eskimo Masks, Art, and Ceremony," her second work, went to print in 1967 and is described as an analytical study of the esthetics and functionalism of Eskimo masks.

In this, her most recent work, Mrs. Ray has recognized that in the Eskimo way of life every member of the community contributed to the whole of that community, and the contribution of the Eskimo artist is to be valued highly.

"Graphic Arts of the Alaskan Eskimo" makes its first appearance at the Tundra Times Ban-

quet October 4. On October 6, it will be released to the public at \$1.00 per copy from Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 20402.

It shall be a source of pride to Alaskan Natives. It will be valuable information to the non-native observer. More than anything, it is a tribute to the Alaskan Eskimo artist.

