

Famous Eskimo Woman Artist-

Gambell's Florence Malewotkuk Works on Exhibition at UA

COLLEGE—A retrospective exhibit of the works of Florence Nupok Malewotkuk—the first major showing of the native artist's work—opens Monday in the showcase display area of the University of Alaska's Fine Arts Complex.

To be on display through Nov. 14, the 35 drawings represent both early and later periods in the life of the St. Lawrence Island Eskimo, who died last spring in Anchorage after a long struggle with cystic hyatid disease.

Although Florence Malewotkuk's works, especially the drawings included in the "Bering Sea Original" series, are widely known, no comprehensive showing of her work was held during her life, which spanned much of this century.

Included in the university exhibit will be 15 drawings executed between 1927-28 under commission from Otto Geist, and 20 drawn shortly before the artist's death, commissioned by Darroll Hargraves.

Exhibit hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 1-4 p.m. on weekends.

The frail Eskimo woman spent most of her life on the remote St. Lawrence Island village of Gambell, where she was born in 1905. Except for a

brief period in the 1950s when she worked in Anchorage, all of her skin and board drawings, depicting Eskimo life as it was lived early this century, were produced at her village home.

The beginning of Florence's life, and the end, are marked by her artistic production. At the age of six years, she was already the family artist, sketching scenes of home life for her uncles.

Executed with pencils and

paper supplied by village missionaries and schoolmasters, the drawings showing the daily life

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GAMBELL ARTIST FEATURED—Florence Nupok Malewotkuk was photographed, shortly before her death, at her home in Gambell, an Eskimo village on St. Lawrence Island. The

native artist is featured in a retrospective exhibit now in progress at the University of Alaska's Fine Arts Complex.

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of the villagers.

Described by Geist as "a hundred years ahead of all the other Islanders, be they men or women," Florence drew, according to the anthropologist, "from life...showing so nicely the usual every day life of the St. Lawrence Eskimo."

In a hide-bound letter to university president Charles Bunnell, Florence described the difficulties she faced in pursuing her artistic calling. "I like to do drawing" she wrote, "but it is sometimes very hard to draw in the agra, our winter houses, because we just have the light of three seal oil lamps and I have to lay on the floor, which is made from walrus hide, and my eyes hurt me sometimes."

As Florence described it, Geist was attracted by some of her drawings which he noticed on her family's boats.

Most of the 93 drawings executed for Geist now rest in the university library archives, where they are available for examination. Of these, 15 have been selected to hang in the retros-

pective exhibition, all showing Florence's early technique of ink outline colored with crayon or paint.

It was about the time of Geist's request that Florence married her husband Chauncy, of whom a portrait is included in the exhibit. Married in traditional fashion, she put aside her drawing for homemaking and rearing of the couple's son.

During these middle years, Florence produced little save an occasional drawing which she would trade for supplies from a passing vessel. It was not until 1955 that she was rediscovered—at the age of 50—by Anchorage artist Kay Roberts, who commissioned the series included in the "Bering Sea Originals." Her drawings appear on placemats sold under the copyrighted name.

While producing these works Florence lived and worked in Anchorage, however, she was unhappy away from the bustling home of her son, and soon returned to Gambell. Another decade passed before her art

again brought Florence to the mainland, this time to Nome, where she was the sole woman artist at an arts and crafts demonstration.

At this time the Arctic anthropologist Hans-George Bandi, who worked extensively with the St. Lawrence Islanders, acquired some of Florence's drawings. He brought them to his native Switzerland, where they generated a great deal of interest. As a result, Florence received commissions for numerous sketches on posterboard or bleached sealskin.

In the 1960s, through her acquaintance with BIA teacher Darrol Hargraves, Florence produced the third major series of her life—a group of over 20 posterboard drawings of the early-century life of her people, depicting their everyday activities, their work and their ceremonies.

By this time her artistic technique had matured; instead of early ink-and-paint combination, Florence was producing sophisticated work entirely in India ink.

When Florence died, her works, which were at that time for sale in many Alaskan gift shops, were taken off the market. The university exhibit marks the first opportunity for the public to view a large and representative selection of Florence's work.

Collector Hargraves, from whose personal collection half of the works come, admits that since childhood he has been fascinated with artifacts of native peoples. Raised in Missouri, at ten years of age he was digging for pottery in the Mississippi River Delta, where relics of the Hopewell Indian can still be found.

The result: he has at this time; he feels, one of the largest private collections of Hopewell pottery.

Coming to Alaska in 1965 as a BIA teacher, Hargraves was spurred to further collecting by the abundance of material in Alaska; he has a large collection of ivory carvings, collected while he was teaching in Barrow, Kivalina and Gambell.

He is presently completing his educational specialist degree here, where he also holds an administrative internship under dean of statewide services Charles O. Ferguson.