

# Native Artist Evaluates Arts

## And Crafts Situation at Nome

2659 Lombard St., No. 202  
San Francisco, Calif. 94123  
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Tundra Times  
Mr. Howard Rock, Editor  
Box 1287  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

Dear Mr. Rock:

WE WOULD LIKE to submit to you our experiences in Nome, Alaska during a recent visit with hopes that it will inform any interested persons as to what is happening there in regards to fine arts and related subjects in Nome.

THROUGH THE combined efforts of the Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc. of New York and the Indian Arts and Crafts Board of the Department of the Interior, I was able to try out a three week printmaking program with the Sunarit Associates, Inc. of Nome. With the only credits towards my ability to instruct being art student finishing my last year in art school and being somewhat familiar with the Nome area, I agreed to come to Nome during a month's free period in between my wife's and my own class schedules. Jan and I both attend the San Francisco Art Institute. She took additional courses in Education at the San Francisco State College this past summer. My wife's expenses to Nome were paid through our own sources while mine were paid by the Indian Arts and Crafts Board.

WE ARRIVED in Nome on the 16th of September after an overnight stay in Fairbanks with my brother, Ron. Ron was on his way to Washington D.C. for the National Arts Council meeting there. Our first contact with Sunarit Associates was just after arrival in Nome and this was after having heard so much of it as a potentially great asset to the native craftsmen of Nome. I met with Mr. Peter Seeganna, the Assistant Supervisor for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board the first day. I learned from him and from the appearance of the workshop the overpowering barriers which Peter faces everyday in attempting to make headway towards more production of high quality crafts.

ONE OF THESE barriers is the lack of information to the public. The lack of any real communications between the people of different village roots in Nome is definitely a barrier. It was hard to realize that Nome does not really offer much of a future to its youngsters due to its factionalism of various cliques and a resultant disinterested general population.

SINCE THE MAJORITY of Nome are Eskimos, the minority of non-Eskimos have considerable influence on the majority by the following methods: The minority holds the business front though land titles and business establishments; the minority are the maj-

ority in handling tourist oriented establishments selling native crafts and productions of ceremonial dances; the majority of the Eskimo children of King Island Village are still lacking educational incentives to learn the importance of reading and writing; the permanent working class of Nome does not have appreciation of the majority's past history and culture as a viable part of Nome's historic past, hence the Nome City Museum is only open when tourists arrive; leadership for the native groups is lacking support from the minority's stronger organizations; housing for the majority's people is kept at minimal standards to date even when federal and state funds are now being utilized for Nome housing; and, the Nome newspaper does not over-extend itself to the majority's area of news and dissent.

TO BE SURE, a lot of the substandard way of living is the way the Nome natives have chosen as their ultimate resignation towards the best they can afford. Nothing better is presented by anyone as of yet.

THE LOCAL RADIO station in Nome, KICY, showed avid interest in helping the Sunarit Associates, but they had not been made aware of the association until I telephoned them about the printmaking project and of the arrival of Mr. Vincent Price, chairman of the commissioners of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board.

THE KING ISLAND Village of Nome is an outcropping from such conditions as the above mentioned and sticks out like a sore thumb because the people moved to Nome more or less at the same time. From fifteen or so years ago when the King Islanders first settled in Nome permanently, they were the last native group to be at first ostracized by the general Nome public. Their children were humiliated by other children as being backward and illiterate.

TODAY THEY ARE accepted as people but their economy at present cannot extricate them from cruel exploitation emerging from all directions. They do not own the land underneath their shacks. These lands are for the most part owned by various gold mining speculators of yesterday who today live in places away from Nome.

NOT ALL THE houses are shacks; three or four families have managed to keep some sort of pride going and do maintain exceptionally neat and sizable houses. But those that have the pride also have the insights of seeing much better opportunities away from the village and one of the larger houses in rented out while the family has moved to Southeastern Alaska.

THE HOUSES DO NOT conform to Nome's city planning committee's rules, therefore most of Nome feel King Island Village

is not part of incorporated Nome. Nome's sanitary services do not bother to extend their services to the Village.

THE TOURIST BUSINESS in Nome make it a point to include King Island Village in their itineraries, extolling the genius and uniqueness of ivory carvers and Eskimo dancers. But they do not encourage contemporary design or furnish comfortable inns as are made available for incoming tourists. Tourism is such a good deal for Nome that the newspaper disapproved of laying cement sidewalks on the front street in place of the boardwalks of old.

NOME WAS HOLDING its latest city government elections just before we left. For the first time, the native element in Nome was a key campaigning factor. Two candidates of Eskimo descent were trying for open seats in the city council. Their success may prove to be the breakthrough needed to represent the native people and incite them towards a more active role in speaking out for the needs of the natives. However, the voting public of Nome has traditionally numbered in the low two hundreds (out of 3,000 population), showing the number of people who trust in the elective system as a constructive means of representation and how many are capable of understanding the elective system at all.

JAN AND I FIRST approached the older people of King Island Village to find out who amongst them would be interested in attending our printmaking workshop.

As most older native groups in Alaska, they distrusted any progressive introductions of new ideas especially if brought out by younger people. They listened quietly and responded quietly. Their leader who emcees the native dances said in effect,

"We have enough problems trying to make ends meet; we are satisfied with immediate payment from the airlines for our endeavors. Let them hunt up the younger generation who do not work towards our livelihood."

Another said, "If it is instruction in abstract art, I do not personally want to participate, it has no meaning for me."

SO, WE ENDED up with a totally new age group—11 years old to 18 years old. They were receptive to a new media. They had to start something themselves and only asked when they felt their media (wood-block printing) gave them specific problems. Even if the average age turned out to be 14½ years old, they produced more than the printmaking department at the University of Alaska within three weeks time.

A GOOD NUMBER of them showed excellent potential in the art of blockprinting, maybe mainly because they are continually exposed to some type of carving at the King Island Village. Many did not know how to spell as was apparent in their attempts to write out titles for their editions. For some, it was noticeable that they had some type of hearing problem when they looked

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