

2014-16-04 PT. 2

Morris Morgan

March 14, 2015

Fairbanks, Alaska

Karen Brewster, interviewer

University of Alaska 100th Anniversary tapes

Karen Brewster told Morris Morgan he must have been to quite a few villages. Morris Morgan said he did go to quite a few villages. He met a lot of noble people. He said if they met you years later they remembered you. He said it was a good feeling to know that you have friends. He said being raised up in poverty he could appreciate the situations in rural areas. It might have been one of the reasons they accepted him and he accepted them. He remembers them fondly.

Brewster asked if he went to other villages outside of the Interior. Morgan said he went up to St. Lawrence Island, Nome, the Kenai Peninsula, and flew out to an island off the coast at Bristol Bay. He brought back artifacts. He said there were times when Dr. Skarland would ask him to go to places for surveying. Otto Geist brought back a lot of materials from Savoonga. He talked about his reason for going to St. Lawrence Island. He was involved with the anthropology department at that time. He went to map and get an aerial perspective of the excavation that was being done. The rules of antiquities were more lax. He said it was quite an adventure.

Brewster said after traveling in the villages she knows it is not always easy going in as a non-Native person. Morgan said he had cordial to hostile relations. The hostility was associated with alcohol. He said it was something you had to work around. You couldn't always control when you left or arrived. He said on one occasion they flew into a village and men came running out and the very experienced pilot said they had to go. The men were all beat up. The pilot turned the plane around and took off. The pilot knew that they had just returned from fire fighting and wanted to charter the plane to bring in alcohol. He said he didn't go to a village with people that had just returned from fire fighting after that.

Brewster commented that in the 1960s some of the conditions in the villages must have been difficult. Morgan said he carried a sleeping bag and said he has slept in all kinds of sheds and sometimes with families. He did hide himself in shacks when the town was drunk. Morgan said most of his encounters were very pleasant. He liked that they were rural people and he was raised up rural.

Brewster asked him to talk about his art. Morgan said he had a picture of his kerosene lamp which he used to study by when he was in high school. Brewster asked him why he started painting. Morgan said he wasn't sure. He had a sister who was quite talented. He said there were a few men selling art courses and they enrolled him as a commercial artist. He did a few lessons. He had ability for it. He took to doing it on his own. Brewster said he must have an innate talent.

Morgan said he used his talent in graduate school. He drew pen and ink drawings of aerial photos. He also made maps. He drew house types and storage bins for corn. Brewster asked what he enjoys about painting. Morgan said he is painting geography. He said he paints a story. He is painting his feelings. He seldom uses human figures. He holds a painting of trees and a field. He talked about finishing the photos. He writes commentary about his paintings. Brewster said many of the paintings of her house looks like real places. He said the painting behind him was the Chena River. He said he visualizes his paintings before he paints them. Many of them are connected with man. He doesn't know why he doesn't put figures in his paintings.

Brewster asked if he goes to locations to paint. Morgan said he has done things like that, but he usually just sketches his painting and then brings it to his studio for painting. He talked about one of his paintings painted from a photograph of a service station in Texas. He thought about using the painting in front of students as a subject for a paper. Brewster said he's continued to paint. Morgan said he has taken a hiatus and has kept his paintings because he has wanted them. He has thrown away a lot of paintings. He has gone back to change paintings, but it usually doesn't improve them. He talked about the materials that he has used. Brewster asked if his style has changed through the years. Morgan said he thought so. Brewster asked why he continues to paint. Morgan said he still does smaller pieces. He talked about the use of different medium. Brewster said his art must be meaningful to him. Morgan said it is a release for him. He talked about the joy of painting. He said if you work to correct something you learn. He has a studio in his house. Brewster asked him to talk about one of his paintings about the Dust Bowl. Morgan said he was never in the Dust Bowl, but his wife lived amongst them. He talked about the composition of his painting. He said this could be used as a teaching tool

[change in location]

Morgan and Brewster move to the studio in his house. He talked about the paintings in his studio. He said abstraction for him has to have a bit of reality.

[change in location]

Morgan and Brewster return to their original interview location. Morgan talked about one of his abstract paintings from 1949. Brewster asked if he has ever had an exhibition. Morgan said no. One time he put a bunch of his paintings in a restaurant in Baton Rouge. He has exhibited in Louisiana. He was the president of the Louisiana Artist Guild at one time. He and his guild donated paintings to a tuberculosis sanatorium. He said he is sensitive about his painting. He has kept his paintings because he has wanted to learn from them. He doesn't sell his paintings. He has given them away. He talked about one of his friends who was a primitive painter.

Brewster asked him to sum up. Morgan said he is thoughtful of the Earth, its people and worries about the mess made on this planet on a daily basis. He thinks people are realizing this is our home and we have about run out of options. He said we should learn about the world, what we can do about it and live sustainably. He said we have to learn about it to use it wisely. He believes there are tipping points where it will be irretrievable. He doesn't believe we are there yet. The Earth has an ability to recover itself. We could become extinct. He thanks the Lord every day for each day.