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Charles Kai Pomeroy, American Indian artist and teacher from Metlakatla

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Fairbanks, Alaska

1978

Series: Potlatch series

Jeff Kennedy said Charles Pomeroy participated in the Festival of Native Arts in March. He asked Pomeroy how he got started.

Charles Pomeroy said when he was a small boy he watched his grandfather carve things. When he got out of the service he took up carving. They didn't have much art around where they were. He liked to instruct kids and bring them up to the level that they can make a living with it. The villages have fishing in the summer, but not much to do in the winter. He said not much is done for the kids. He wants to push a career of art. He said if they have the knowledge they can create things. He is part Haida and French Canadian. He discussed craftsmen versus artists. He wants to train artists. He said people are stereotyped. He is not trying to break from tradition. He wants to incorporate new design into various media. He said they don't have a cultural center on campuses, but there aren't places for artists to share each other's skills. He said different groups have borrowed from other tribes. The art has become intermixed. A lot of the traditional art is now located in other places. He talked about the difficulty of funding and running a program. They have to understand the students just like any other educational program.

Jeff Kennedy asked him about his work and funding. Pomeroy said his funding came from CETA. He is a certified welder and he can work in mills and canneries. When the mill shut down he applied for an art instructor position. He tries to have an introduction to north coast art for fifth and sixth grade students. The students come in for two hours a week. He talked about teaching them certain designs for traditional northwest art. The following year the students who are interested return for another year of instruction. He talked about getting an artist in residence program going. He hopes in future years they can have ten or fifteen institutes where the artists can have a place to study. This would be similar to the program in Gallup, New Mexico. Kennedy asked if he would like each grade school and high school to have an artist in residence. Pomeroy said he has traveled as an environmental health safety artist. He would make safety posters. He talked about the different types of safety posters. They related to the home in the bush. He said there are still students that come to live in the village like Fort Yukon while they are attending school. He would like to pick out these villages and have an artist in residence. He said there are a lot of students who want this.

Kennedy asked about students taking the art courses throughout Alaska and wondered if they would be able to make a living in the future. Pomeroy said yes. They need to bring up the quality and not the quantity. He talked about students getting a degree and then returning home and not

using their degree. He said they can create works in a cultural center, producing brochures and having a show to bring in the buyer. He doesn't think the artist makes money in the gift shop. Kennedy said one cultural center could serve five or six villages. Trappers could also participate. The gift shop sells things on consignment and charges quite a bit while the artist doesn't get paid much. Buyers are looking for good art work. The gift shop owner realizes this and may hold items back for the buyer. He talked about the difficulty of peddling your own art work.

Kennedy asked about creating competition. Pomeroy said there is always room for quality work. He said produce one masterpiece instead of lots of pieces of work. He talked about the competition to Native art. He hopes to get funding this summer for a kiln. He talked about white artists with Eskimo names and their works.

Kennedy asked him about producing pieces of work. Pomeroy said the students have the capacity to produce masterpieces. Pomeroy said he would rather produce one piece a year instead of forty or fifty pieces of junk a year. He talked about getting funds to stake an artist or cultural center. He thinks it is the government's job to help people help themselves. He said in the villages there isn't enough for the kids to do. He said in his town the students want to come in during the evening to his studio to work. He said the students need four or five years of training.