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Nathaniel Tarn, Roger Lang, Bill Vaudrin, Richard Burmeister, and Larry Ahvakana speak at the Native Arts and Literature Conference held in Sitka, Alaska in December 1975

Moses Wassillie, moderator

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Moses Wassillie said Nathaniel Tarn is a poet from the lower forty eight who attended the conference. He talked about Native possession of native possession of materials and art.

Nathaniel Tarn said material poverty is one thing. It is clear that most non-Natives are better off than most Natives. Cultural poverty is becoming universal as we grind towards monoculture. He thinks we are all involved in change and there's no room for romanticism. He said it seems to him there are three steps towards conversation on the Native side. The Natives must tell the non-Natives the steps to take on their own side because unless we say what we think and they say what they think he doesn't see how any talk can happen. The first step is Native art and Native aesthetics must be owned and possess and defined and created by Natives alone. It is very late but not too late for Native economic power as it is now to preserve what is still in hand. He recommends to buy back what can still be bought back and to attend to the problem of the creation of new both in its own traditions and to the outside world. He does not see how it can ever be done without complete Native ownership of those things which can still be owned and reclaimed. The second step is to take from the rest of the world whatever is needed such as books, education and travel. He knows that the regional corporations are taking moves in that direction. As far as art is concerned the whole question of whether or not a Native art one could and two should enter universal art is raised by this second step. It is important to raise these questions under some such heading as metropolitan versus regional art. There is a definite question of choice which can't be made by anybody else than the owners. Whether they are to keep that for themselves or send it out into the world. He thinks it should be sent out into the world but it is not his business to decide that. The third step is one he can hope for. He said Native art can go out and teach. It knows it can teach what technological civilization is doing to destroy the Earth. He talked about Edwardson's book. It can question the disappearance of diversity and consumerist progress. We non-Natives have forgotten too much for anyone's good. If Native culture does that it might meet non-Native men and women who believe that we are all Native or that none of us are Native. There are universal criteria for these things: the respect for all life. We are all children with everything to learn.

Song by Bobby Womack.

Moses Wassillie said former president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, Roger Lang, talks about education in Alaska and standards by which we live by in the system. Roger Lang said in order to teach and to be a certificated teacher you have to meet certain standards. The standards are not set by Alaska

Natives they are set by a system. The system is steeped in tradition. Theirs is founded on a principle which perpetuates the system rather than finishing the product. In order to teach you need a piece of paper not the needs of traditions to teach. In order to get the paper you must sit in a chair for four years. That's how you get to be a teacher and fit the system. That is part of the problem today of being an Alaskan Native. If their system doesn't fit theirs and their tradition doesn't fit their tradition how they create their own teacher. They can learn a lot by looking at what is happening. It has been his privilege to be able to compare what other people are doing through educational processes. He talked about the Greenland educational system. They educate in the Inuit language. Things are changing in Alaska but very slowly. It is hard to change systems. There are too many people dedicated to the preservation of a system.

Moses said Bill Vaudrin was the president of the Inupiat University of the Arctic. Bill Vaudrin said in the early days of bilingual education they used to think translating anything was a step forward. He gave the example of Goldie Locks and the three bears. The whole story is based on values completely foreign to Yupik culture. Any Yupik Eskimo who was lost and cold and found a cabin they would be welcome to eat, sleep and rest. A translation of a foreign story based on a foreign value system is more destructive. Their primary goal is to provide the kind of education that will enable graduates of Inupiat University to live comfortably in a variety of lifestyles ranging from traditional subsistence to an urban technocratic society and a combination of the two. They don't believe it is any more ethical for them than it is for the BIA to predetermine for students by what they teach or don't teach the kinds of lives they will lead. They do feel an obligation to assure that their choices in that regard are based on a working knowledge of a heritage and a system of values that has withstood the test of time and adversity like few others and not merely endured.

Unidentified song

Moses Wassillie said Richard Burmeister heads up the Indian Ed program at Nome. He talked about the subjects taught by the northwest Natives as he showed slides. Richard Burmeister said the students are learning to construct snowshoes. He talked about berry buckets. Paul Nagorak is one of the last people to construct berry buckets. They constructed buckets in the classroom this year. They have also taught with a variety of instructors: sinew making, kayak building, dog sled construction, dog sled handling, hand tool construction for carving, toboggan building, and took a group of students whale hunting.

Song by the Carpenters

Larry Avakana from Barrow talks about his art training. He said he attended several art schools and had the training of the western style of creation. He never worked with ivory until recently. He had worked with stone which is not part of his culture. He feels his culture. Being an artist was important to him. Being a Native artist wasn't a step until he took it recently. He wanted to grow within himself. He talked about working with marble. He said all the materials he has used were foreign to his people. He had a good respect for a lot of the Indian cultures in the southwest. They helped him understand about himself. He also developed a glass blowing workshop in Barrow. He developed this through the help of

instructors and friends. He talked about the story of the little people and his art about them. He says he is working with strange materials and strange ideas that his people may not understand.