



Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association

BY YVONNE MARACLE

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The Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association (NIIPA), is a national, non-profit organization meeting the needs of its photographic membership. The organization became reality in 1985, shortly after the first conference of Native Indian Photography was held. Through this unique event, it was evident that an agency had to be formed to deal with the stereotypical views that had been portrayed of Native North Americans.

In 1985 it was established that the organization would deal directly with issues relating to the improvement of the image of Native people as depicted in the media, exhibitions, publications, etc. At this time, NIIPA opened many doors for Native photographers to have their work accepted by the artistic community at large, as well as for the visual education of the non-Native public as to the Indian culture. More and more organizations wanted to see these travelling exhibitions and to understand what has happened to Native North Americans over the years. A greater dialogue of communication has been developed with the aid of NIIPA and its member photographers.

Now in 1989, four years since the inception of NIIPA, the direction and focus of the organization has changed. We still encourage the promotion and education aspect in relation to Native people and its culture, but we also act as a resource centre for images regarding the many aspects of the Native way of life. Our member photographers have moved a long way since the beginning of NIIPA: they have become more educated and sophisticated in the philosophy and technology of the visual medium called photography.

Many Native photographers are using this medium to better understand themselves, as well as to educate the public. Photography is a visual medium that enables Native people to express themselves to the non-native community. NIIPA therefore encourages any aspect that allows the Na-

tive photographer to conduct his or her projects, be it through workshops, exhibitions, conferences or publications.

Since photography is fairly new to Native people as an artistic tool, NIIPA encourages the further development of this craft. To better understand it and to use it as an education component in teaching about the Native culture will ensure a better understanding between Natives and non-natives.

NIIPA also operates the only photography gallery dedicated to displaying works produced by Native photographers. We act as a stepping-stone for many photographers who are learning how to submit their work to galleries for exhibitions. We provide them with as much material as possible to allow them to best represent themselves. We also organize various travelling exhibitions, as well as take part in special events that require small photographic exhibits relating to Native North Americans.

One of the objectives established in 1985 was the development of a resource centre that would include photographs, slides, videos and any publications regarding the Native culture or its people. We presently provide visual material, such as slides, to various organizations and publication agencies for research or display. We would like to further develop this part of the gallery operation, allowing a wider selection of work to be included in a resource library.

With the many Native organizations that produce regular publications and newsletters, we all will be able to work for the betterment of Native people as to greater awareness of the Native North American and issues relating to them. In a country that once belonged to Native people, it's unfortunate how little the non-Native community actually knows about their aboriginal peoples.

Through gallery representation and the other services that NIIPA provides, we are able to communicate and visually express ourselves as Native people to the public. We don't ask for assimilation of our culture, but for a better understanding and acceptance of the Native way of life.

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