

Digital Traditions

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Nancy Basket

Interviewed by T.C. Foster

Pine needle basketry... (01:36)

<Video opens with Nancy Basket>

N. Basket: Native American people have always used the materials that were around them to create objects of beauty. And, in fact, there isn't, um, a word in the Native American language for art. We have words for beauty, but art is everything that we do. We try to do the best that we can and make it beautiful. Um, in the northwest we have some long pine needles, but not as long as the ones in the south. Um, I don't know my tribal traditional baskets of oak and river cane and honeysuckle because those plants don't grow up in the west-or in the northwest. So I had to come back here. So now it's time for me to learn those things again; I have a teacher on the reservation that will help me. Um, the pine needles are very important to me. So is-is the bear. And these pine needle-bears symbolize the animals that help me understand what I am to do on the red road. But, there is a story, a Cherokee story, about the seven boys who, uh, later one of them turns into the pine tree. There's a whole series of events, um-so when Native American people look out the window they can see this pine tree and remember this story instantly and that's how Native American people teach their children: by stories. So that we are not alienating ourselves from nature and from things that are real, but, um, we feel a kinship with a tree, with a rock, with a river, and they are our brothers and sisters, so we wouldn't hurt them, just like we wouldn't hurt our two-legged brothers and sisters.