

Spirit — Sua (literally, “Its person”), Anerneq (literally, “breath”)

CAIQ TAMARMI SUANGQ’RTUQ. – SOMETHING ALL AROUND HAS A SPIRIT.



Photo: Historic ceremonial mask, ca. 1872, Pinart Collection, Châteaux Musée, France. Masks were worn during dances that called spirits to the human world.

The Alutiiq concept of a spirit is complex. Alutiiq people traditionally believe that everything in the universe—living things, objects, places, and natural phenomena like the northern lights—has a spirit or essence. This essence is characterized by its human conscience. The word *sua* literally means “its person,” illustrating the sentient, human dimension of all things. To have a spirit is to have a person inside, and this spirit can take a human shape. For example, the spirits of animals can show themselves, peering out from their animal bodies or removing their skins to uncover their human form. This is why animals can often look like people and why people sometimes become animals by putting on skins.

In addition to the spirits of earthly things, the Alutiiq universe has great spirits, some of whom inhabit the sky worlds. *Llam Sua*, the spirit of all things, lives in the fifth and purest sky world. This spirit can see and hear everything but is invisible to people. *Kas’arpak*, the spirit who created all birds and animals, lives in the third sky world. This spirit assists shamans, relaying the wishes of *Llam Sua* to earth. There are also two female spirits, *Imam Sua*, ruler of the sea, and *Nunam Sua*, ruler of the forest, who live on earth. These spirits control the creatures in their domains and Alutiiq people called upon them for hunting luck.