

## Eye of the Universe — Llam iingalaa

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**KALLALET LLAM IINGALAAKUN AGTAALLRIIT. – SHAMANS USED TO GO THROUGH THE EYE OF THE UNIVERSE.**

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Photo: Leather mask cover with painted spiral design, Koniag, Inc. Collection, Karluk One, AM193.

In Alutiiq cosmology, the heavens have five distinct regions. Think of these regions as a set of layers, one on top of the next. Here, the highest layer is the purest and the furthest from Earth. This region is home to the *Llam Sug'i*, the People of the Universe. These are the supreme beings in the Alutiiq world, with the ability to see all. Alutiiq traditions hold that less pure beings live in the lower layers of the universe. When people die, their souls are thought to move into the sky world closest to Earth. By acting honorably, they can be purified and move into the next layer of the universe. Over time, anyone's soul can become a Person of the Universe.

Artists often depict the Alutiiq universe as a spiral or a set of concentric circles. In the Alutiiq language, this design is known as *Llam iingalaa*, the eye of the Universe. It is at least 2,000 years old. Some of the most ancient examples are carved in labrets made of coal. The tops of large, oval labrets feature a circular hole in the center with one or two concentric circles carved around this hole. A spiral design is among the petroglyphs, estimated to be about 1,000 years old. And if you look carefully at other types of Alutiiq art, you will also see concentric circles. Alutiiq people make rattles from a series of nested, circular wooden hoops. Parkas feature multiple bands of design that encircle the wearer—from the hem to the collar.

Why did Alutiiq ancestors use this design so often? It reaffirmed the structure of the universe and the place of people in the world. It reminded people that they were being observed by powerful beings, and it emphasized the need for honorable behavior.