Artwork Purchased for Museum Collection

With a $24,000 grant the Alutiiq Museum will purchase three works of art for its permanent collection. They are *Big Sum Bich #2*, an oil painting by Alvin Eli Amason; *Ituwik Grandpa*, a plank mask by Lena Snow Amason-Berns; and a leather-lined, spruce root basket by Arlene Skinner. Each is a unique work of art inspired by Kodiak history and Alutiiq heritage.

*Big Sum Bich #2* is the second in a series of three bear portraits Alvin Amason has been working on this fall. The piece is inspired by Amason’s grandfather Eli Metrokin, the first Alutiiq man to become a master bear guide. One of Metrokin’s favorite stories was about glassing for bears in Kiliuda Bay with a client. After days of not seeing a bear they spotted a “big sum bich” in a high mountain snow patch. The name of Amason’s painting comes from this story.

*Ituwik Grandpa* is a plank mask by Lena Amason-Berns. This colorful carving features a bear’s head and carries the Alutiiq name for Old Harbor’s Big Creek - *Ituwik*. The mask honors Amason-Bern’s father-in-law, Rick Bern, for his many contributions to community and family life. Amason-Berns integrated materials, imagery, and numbers into the mask to reflect Mr. Berns. These include board from the family seiner the FV Melissa Rae, images of fish and birds, and his aviation call sign.

Skinner’s basket is woven from Kodiak area spruce roots she harvested and processed. The weaving has a lining of locally harvested deer hide, tanned with willow bark by Skinner’s daughter artist Coral Chernoff. Beads of amber, glass, and turquoise adorn the handles and rims of the basket, and reflect the diversity of cultures and traditions that contribute to the piece—ancient Alutiiq, historic European, and contemporary American Indian.

Support for these purchases comes from the Art Acquisition Fund. Established by Rasmuson Foundation in 2003, and administered by Museums Alaska, the fund supports the development of contemporary art collections in Alaska’s museums. Twice a year, the fund invites proposals from museums and cultural centers to purchase the work of living Alaskan artists, made within the past five years. Since the fund’s inception, the Alutiiq Museum has received $184,778 to purchase 122 works by 34 different artists. A selection of these pieces will be shown in the museum’s gallery in January 2017, as part of the *Living Alaska* exhibit.

“The Art Acquisition fund does more than provide artwork for museums,” said Alutiiq Museum Executive Director April Laktonen Counceller. “It helps to sustain our cultural arts. The opportunity for artists to sell their works directly impacts their ability to keep creating. We are grateful for the chance to add these works to our collections, and for the continued exploration of Alutiiq history and tradition that they reflect.”

The Alutiiq Museum is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and sharing the history and culture of the Alutiiq, an Alaska Native tribal people. Representatives of Kodiak Alutiiq organizations govern the museum with funding from charitable contributions, memberships, grants, contracts, and sales.