Works by Five Artists Added to Museum Collection

With a $12,925 grant from Museums Alaska, the Alutiiq Museum will purchase five works of art for its permanent collection. The pieces are the creations of five different artists with links to Alutiiq culture or to Kodiak.

From Kodiak Alutiiq artist Mary Jane Longrich, the museum will purchase *Nootka Rose*, a contemporary doll made of historic and gathered materials. The doll wears a kuspuk sewn of fabric scraps from a dress Longrich made for herself in the seventh grade. It also features beaded earrings, wool hair, and scraps of land otter fur.

Two beaded headdresses are also among the purchases and reflect the museum’s current focus on studying and sharing the beading arts. These pieces are *Emerald Isle*, a 24” headdress by Patricia Abston-Cox of Kodiak, and *Woman’s Headdress*, a 36” garment by Melinda Abyo of Anchorage. Both women are Alutiiq artists who learned to make beaded regalia while participating in Alutiiq dance groups. Abston-Cox is one of the founding members of the Kodiak Alutiiq dancers and learned to bead under the tutelage of Dee Dee Chya, Margaret Roberts, and her mother, Virginia Abston. Abyo has performed with Imamsuat, an Alutiiq dance group in Anchorage, and learned to bead from Lalla Williams.

From Andrew Abyo, also of Anchorage, the museum will purchase a model *anqyaq*—open skin boat. The 41” replica is carefully modeled after the shape and proportions of a traditional, Alutiiq, open, skin-covered boat. It is carved from basswood and covered in suede secured with imitation sinew. Before Russian conquest, these large, open watercraft were owned by wealthy families who maintained them for use in trading, raiding, and long distance traveling. They were symbolic of wealth and accomplishment.

The fifth piece is *Sound of Fog*, a multi-media work by Kodiak artist Woody Koning. This work combines painting with a sculptural element to depict the foggy coastline of Kalsin Bay. The focal point is a sea stack made from cast plaster that extends off the canvas. Locally known as Helena’s Island, the islet is named for Helena Emook Schweite, an Inupiaq woman who settled in Chiniak in 1964 with her husband. Koning and Schweite were neighbors for many years. The sea stack featured in *Sound of Fog* is a spot where Schwiete harvested shellfish and where her ashes were scattered.

Support for these purchases comes from the Art Acquisition Fund. Established by Rasmuson Foundation in 2003, the fund promotes the development of contemporary art collections in Alaska.
museums. Three times a year, museums may submit proposals to purchase recent works by living Alaskan artists. Museums Alaska, the state-wide museum association, administers the fund.

Alutiiq Museum Executive Director April Counceller said, “The stories we can tell with these objects are rich and important. For example, the use of old fabric in Mary Jane’s doll speaks to the value of recycling in our culture, of never wasting resources. Andrew’s boat model will help us talk about the Russian conquest of Kodiak and how large boats that were once forbidden are now returning to community awareness. And Woody’s homage to Helena Schweite reminds us of the many indigenous people from beyond Kodiak that have added to our community. We are so grateful to the Art Acquisition Fund for making these purchases possible.”

Since the fund’s inception in 2003, the Alutiiq Museum has received $230,078.50 in grants to purchase 144 works by 45 artists. These pieces can be enjoyed in the contemporary art gallery on the Alutiiq Museum’s website at https://alutiiqmuseum.org/explore/collections/types-of-collections/contemporary-art.

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.

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