Project to Study and Teach Alutiiq Beading Funded

With a $74,000 contract from the US Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Alutiiq Museum and the Sun’aq Tribe of Kodiak will partner on the Pinguat (Beads) Project—a two-year effort to study and teach Alutiiq beading. The project, which begins this month, will center around the study and replication of historic, beaded regalia currently on display in the museum’s gallery.

In 1872, French anthropologist Alphonse Pinart collected three sets of rare beaded garments from the Kodiak region—coordinated headdresses, belts, and cuffs. These pieces are now part of the collections of the Musée Boulogne-Sur-Mer, France and one set returned to the Alutiiq Museum last summer on loan. While in Kodiak, the pieces will be used to mentor a group of contemporary beaders. The museum plans to host a master beading class in November 2019 where artists will gather to study the ancestral pieces and make a replica set for the museum. The process will be documented on film and educational resources developed and shared in the community. Alutiiq Museum Executive Director April Laktonen Counceller explains.

“The four pieces visiting from France are one of only three complete sets of Alutiiq beaded regalia known and they hold knowledge no longer living in our community. By inviting artists to study them, we will preserve knowledge of the pieces and create a set inspired by them for our collections. We will also grow awareness of beading traditions and help people learn regalia making. We want community members to be able to design and make their own regalia. Written direction, and video of people working will help more members of our community learn this beautiful art.”

Artists are invited to apply for a place in the master class. There are eight positions available, one for a team leader and seven for team members. The team leader will be an expert beader who can mentor the class, finish the replicas, and help the museum develop educational resources. Team members will participate in making a replica set of the items for the museum’s collections and they will participate in a community event.

Counceller said, “We are looking for artists who have some experience with beading. You do not need to be a highly skilled beader to participate in the team, but a history or working in this medium and a willingness to share the skills you learn with others are preferred.”

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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