Alutiiq Treasures Arrive from France

On Saturday, July 7, the Alutiiq Museum received a shipment of rare ancestral objects from France’s Musée Bolougne-sur-Mer. Two ceremonial masks and a set of beaded regalia arrived in Kodiak, accompanied by Musée director Mrs. Elikya Kandot. The pieces are part of the Pinart Collection, an assemblage of late nineteenth century Kodiak Alutiiq objects. They will visit Kodiak for five years. They replace two ceremonial masks, also from the Pinart Collection, scheduled to return France this week with Mrs. Kandot.

The loan is part of a long-term, cultural exchange between the French and Alutiiq peoples. For more than twenty years Alutiiq culture bearers and museum leaders have been visiting Bolougne-sur-Mer to study the Pinart Collection and share cultural traditions and contemporary artwork. The collection, made in 1872 by French anthropologist Alphonse Pinart, includes many rare pieces of Alutiiq ceremonial gear. Masks, drums, headdresses, and a feast bowl provide a rich record of traditional arts, ritual practices, spiritual beliefs, and the Alutiiq language. Pinart collection vocabulary, songs, and legends with the objects.

Elders, culture bearers, tribal leaders, Kodiak Mayor Pat Branson, and Alaska State Senator Gary Stevens gathered at the Alutiiq Museum this morning to greet the masks and beaded items. Prayers and songs in Alutiiq welcomed both Mrs. Kandot and the ancestral items, which were uncrated while those assembled watched with excitement.

“We are so very grateful to the French for recognizing the value of these piece to the Alutiiq community, and for their willingness to share them on long-term loan,” said Alutiiq Museum Executive Director April Laktonen Counceller. “We are particularly excited to borrow a complete set of beaded regalia—a headdress, a belt, and a pair of cuffs. These pieces are one of just a handful of complete sets in the world and our artists can learn a great deal from their design and construction.”

In September, the objects will be incorporated into Alutiiq Spirituality, Alutiiq Museum displays that explore traditional beliefs and ceremonial practices. They will also support arts education. The museum plans to assemble a group of beaders to study and recreate the regalia. This will help artists learn directly from the work of an ancestor and provide the museum with replicas to share when the historic set returns to France.

Generous support for this phase of the cultural exchange was provided by Koniag, Inc., Old Harbor Native Corporation, Chugach Alaska Corporation, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, Perry Eaton, E/P Roofing, and Betsy Lawer.

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.