



For Immediate Release

Alutiiq Museum & Archaeological Repository
215 Mission Road, Suite 101, Kodiak, AK 99615
Phone: 844-425-8844
Home page: alutiiqmuseum.org

DATE: October 29, 2024

CONTACT: Curator of Collections Amanda Lancaster
amanda@alutiiqmuseum.org

Ancestral Mask Returned to the Alutiiq Museum

KODIAK, Alaska—An ancestral mask collected on Kodiak Island has been transferred to the Alutiiq Museum. Records suggest that the rare ceremonial carving may have been made around 1820, during the height of the Russian fur trade. However, the mask's early history is unknown. In the 1980s, the mask was purchased in a Montreal gallery, and in 1991 it was donated to McMaster University's Museum of Art in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Recognizing the carving's spiritual significance and the importance of transferring it to an institution aligned with its heritage, McMaster offered the piece to the Alutiiq Museum. In September, the mask returned to Kodiak.

"We were so happy to receive this mask," said Executive Director April Laktonen Counciller. "We were not aware of its existence. McMaster University took the time to find our institution, explain the situation, complete transfer paperwork, pack the piece in a custom-made box, and ship it to Alaska. They were not required to return it, but we are glad they did."

The mask is unique. It is small, about 28 x 17 cm, and in two pieces. The lower half of the face is lashed to the upper half, creating a space representing a mouth. Although it features the heavy brow found in other Alutiiq masks, the piece has an unusual asymmetrical face. Its creator carved a tilted brow, bent nose, and one partially closed eye. The design is similar to an ancestral mask from Karluk and to asymmetrical masks made by neighboring peoples. Some people believe such carvings are shamanic and show a spiritual transformation in progress. Others suggest that asymmetrical faces represent a particular spirit in the cosmology of arctic peoples.

Pictures of the mask are available on the Amutat database, a collection of photographs of Alutiiq ethnographic objects on the museum's website. The public is invited to see the mask on Friday, November 1 at the Alutiiq Museum Store at the Downtown Marketplace. The museum will share the piece in honor of Kodiak's First Friday Art Walk between 5 pm and 7 pm. This is a free event. Everyone is welcome.

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

#