



For Immediate Release

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Works by Five Artists Added to Museum Collection

With a \$16,950 grant from Museums Alaska, the Alutiiq Museum will purchase works from five artists for its permanent collection. The pieces are the creations of Rolf Lee Christiansen of Old Harbor, Cheryl Lacy of Wasilla, and Janelle Barton, Arlene Skinner, and Stacy Studebaker of Kodiak. They were offered to the museum through a public call for artwork last September, and then selected for their craftsmanship and connections to the museum's mission. Alutiiq Museum Executive Director April Counciller explained.

"We are proud of our contemporary art collection," said Counciller. "Our staff, volunteer collections advisory committee, and our board review every piece. This thoughtful process ensures we collect works that best exemplify Alutiiq traditions and the Alutiiq world. Over the past twenty years, the fund has allowed us to build a sizeable collection of contemporary art representing this era of our history—from the reawakening of traditions, to issues that impact our communities, and the environment that sustains us. It's particularly meaningful that we can purchase additional works now—during national Native American Heritage Month. The selected pieces will help us tell Alutiiq stories in our exhibits, publications, and educational programs for years."

From Christiansen, the museum will purchase a set of three hand-carved stone oil lamps. Two of the lamps have petroglyph engravings. The third has a mask sculpted in the bowl—a relief carving designed to emerge as the oil burns. The lamps are made from water-rounded cobbles collected on the beach below Refuge Rock—where a 1784 massacre of Alutiiq people by Russian traders took place. Today Refuge Rock is on Native land near Christiansen's home. By creating beautiful cultural objects from rocks collected in this infamous location, Christiansen demonstrates the persistence of his people and culture. Two and a half centuries after the massacre, the Alutiiq have reclaimed the Refuge Rock and are reawakening traditions suppressed by colonialism.

From Lacy, the museum will purchase *How Big Was Your Fish?*, a three-dimensional beaded mask. Nineteenth-century Alutiiq masks inspired this piece. The work includes the traditional mask parts—a face, hoop fitted with decorative attachments, and cross braces – covered in beadwork. There are also subtle beaded petroglyph designs in the mask's face. Lacy's piece shares ancestral designs in a modern format. In her proposal, Lacy said, "I've always wanted to make an Alutiiq mask, but I don't know how to carve. I do know how to bead."

From Barton, the museum will purchase a pair of baleen bracelets—one of humpback and the other of grey whale baleen. Barton cleaned, carved, bent, and polished the baleen to create pieces that resemble traditional cuffs worn around the wrist of a *kanaglluk*—gut skin jacket. Although widely used in ancestral technologies, baleen working faded in the nineteenth century as commercial whale harvesting supplanted Alutiiq hunting. Barton's work represents efforts to reintegrate this valuable material into artistic practice.

From Skinner, the museum will purchase *Contemporary Woman's Spruce Root Hat*. Made from locally harvested spruce root, this hat is modeled after ancestral pieces featuring a wide, gently sloped brim encircling a conical cap.

Among the Alutiiq, spruce root hats were typically worn by men and decorated with hunting talismans. Skinner's reinterpretation is designed for a woman. She uses the classic form but signals femininity with decorations. The edge of the hat is trimmed in fluffy, pink cotton fabric, the cap has train of white mohair, and glittery beads and shells provide embellishment. Spruce root hats are difficult to weave. Skinner's piece will be only the second complete example in the museum's holdings.

From Studebaker, the museum will purchase *Western Sandpiper at Low Tide*, a color pencil drawing of a shorebird in Kalsin Bay. The naturalistic drawing shows the animal in its environment. It reveals both an intertidal species Alutiiq people have a history of harvesting and the shoreline habitat in which the bird lives. Alutiiq Elders report hunting such birds at low tide at night and adding them to soups and stews. The drawing helps to reveal the diversity of bird life in the Kodiak region and provides an opportunity to discuss the importance of birds to subsistence and spirituality.

Support for these purchases comes from the Alaska Art Fund. Established by Rasmuson Foundation in 2003, the fund promotes the development of contemporary art collections in Alaska museums. Museums Alaska, the state-wide museum association, administers the fund. Images of the recent purchases can be seen in the [contemporary art gallery](#) on the museum's website.

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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