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Ashley Jensen

Small, intimate paintings on water-worn cobbles are capturing Alutiiq places and traditions. These charming portraits are the work of Ashley Jensen, who is exploring her heritage through art. Ashley's father, Daniel Olsen, immersed her in the Alutiiq world. It was particularly important to him that Ashley understand family history. Now, Ashley is capturing pieces of that history in paint. It began as a way to thank new friends.

As a member of the Koniag Shareholder Committee, Ashley enjoyed meeting other Alutiiq people and building connections. Last fall, she decided to make gifts for her fellow committee members. She painted each a scene from their home village. She was surprised by the very positive responses.

"I didn't expect the emotional reaction and the way it becomes a tangible memory of places that mean so much. . . I just wanted to do something nice, but people liked them so much, I was inspired!"

In May, Ashley registered with the Alutiiq Seal program. She did not intend to sell her work. However, her pieces are so unique and beautifully made, we asked her to participate.

"... it was such a great opportunity . . . it was so emotional and meant the world for me," said Ashley. "My husband took my Alutiiq Seal acceptance letter and one of the seal tags and framed them for me to have in my studio."



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Learning About Museums

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Alutiiq Museum



A year ago, Veronica Johnson didn't know much about exhibits or artifacts. She was interested in museums and the possibility of working in one. Building a career tied to her Alutiiq heritage was an exciting idea, but getting started was a challenge. A ten-month apprenticeship shadowing Exhibits Manager Alex Painter provided a valuable opportunity to explore museum work and to contribute to an important project. Veronica became an essential member of the team building the museum's new exhibits. She learned to handle delicate cultural belongings and solder mounts to hold them safely in displays. She installed panels and murals, and she assisted carpenters, painters, and welders.

The apprenticeship fueled Veronica's excitement for museum work and grew her resume. She said, "It was incredibly rewarding and a valuable experience where I built a lot of skills that I didn't even realize I would learn. It is so rewarding to be able to go through the new museum and know that I helped make it happen." Veronica's experience is not unique. Thanks to grant funds, corporate sponsorships, and agency partnerships, the museum has offered a suite of internships in recent years. Sarah Simeonoff assisted museum archaeologists with site surveys. Albert Simeonoff spent a week with excavating an ancestral site at Karluk Lake. Sylvia Seaton and Scarlett Johnson are organizing collections in the new vault. Lexi Serrano is assisting visitors.

"Our staff are great teachers, and the museum is an excellent place to learn career skills. We do so many different things—from education and archaeology to language documentation, and retail," said Executive Director April Counciller. "I know how powerful these opportunities can be. My early experiences with the museum involved an internship."

Alutiiq Rasitalat

Alutiiq people's newsletter



Camd'i Hello,

In May, hundreds of people attended the museum's grand reopening. We are grateful for the strong turnout and the tremendous community support it reflects. It's hard to express just how much your help means to us. Remodeling our building took years of hard work and contributions from so many—advice, donations, hands-on assistance, and encouragement.

As a symbol of our thanks, we gave away 500 beaded necklaces on opening weekend. At Alutiiq gatherings, it is traditional for the host family to provide gifts of food and clothing. We mirrored this tradition, working with staff and volunteers to create gifts of necklaces in Alutiiq colors and patterns. If you would like to make one, directions are now available on the beading page of our website. Look for the single-strand necklace activity.

As we settle back into giving tours, assisting researchers, and working with artists, we remain grateful to everyone who helped transform our space and launch the next decade of service. We hope you will visit often. The new Alutiiq Museum is for you, and we are very proud to share it. Quyanac tallicil!—Thank you for coming!

April Istik Counciller
Executive Director

OUR MISSION

The Alutiiq Museum preserves and shares the heritage and living culture of the Alutiiq people.

OUR VISION

Celebrating heritage through living culture.

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Pisurno—the hunter (left) and Armaq—the woman (right)

Memories of Port Lions

A box of photographs is so much more than a box of photographs! Every image captures a moment in time and has the potential to preserve memories of people, places, and events. The Alutiitq Museum has been working to document the twentieth-century Alutiitq world with photographs. This summer, Kodiak resident Linda Freed contributed a stack of black and white pictures from her travels to area villages. The photos capture village life in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a time when many people in rural communities didn't have cameras.

To share Linda's gift, and thank her, we posted one photo to social media—an image of the Driftwood Café, Port Lions, 1981. We knew nothing else about the photo or the café. Port Lions residents, past and present, helped to fill us in. One reported that the café belonged to Helen Nelson. Others remembered that Nelson served everything from taco baskets and burgers to chicken wings, eggs, pancakes, milkshakes, and blue bubblegum ice cream. People reported that Nelson was generous and that her restaurant was a gathering place filled with laughter. These memories brought the Driftwood Café back to life and helped the museum document a special part of Port Lions for future generations.

"I remember the awesome food and kindness. I was real young and she let me make pies for her restaurant before I discovered Never Fall Piecrust. She told everyone I made them, and they said it was good!" – Diane Nelson Cooper

If you would like to share your family's photos with the museum, please contact Amanda Lancaster, amanda@alutiitqmuseum.org. We can scan your images for our archives and return your paper copies with a digital backup.



A decorated stone oil lamp brought to the museum by Craig Johnson.

Kodiak's coastline is dotted with archaeological sites, places where Alutiitq ancestors lived, harvested, and raised families. Coastal erosion often exposes these sites, spilling their contents onto the shore. For beachcombers, finding an ancestral tool is exciting. But who owns artifacts, and what should you do if you find one?

Archaeological sites and their content belong to landowners, wherever they are found, and artifacts can only be collected with landowner permission. Artifacts are also part of the record of Alutiitq history. Taking them removes valuable information, and it is disrespectful. It's like tearing a page from a history book.

Many Kodiak families have artifact collections, made before awareness of protective laws. What can you do with such a collection? Contact the Alutiitq Museum. We have agreements with the archipelago's major landowners that allow us to care for these pieces for everyone, and use them for research and education.

Nearly every month, someone brings artifacts to the museum. Kodiak's Craig Johnson recently gave us a unique stone lamp. Made from a large water-worn cobble, the lamp has a carved face and stick-like arms with three fingers! He found it eroding from an Alutiitq settlement while he was commercial fishing nearly fifty years ago. For Alutiitq artists exploring lamp making, this piece will be especially intriguing.

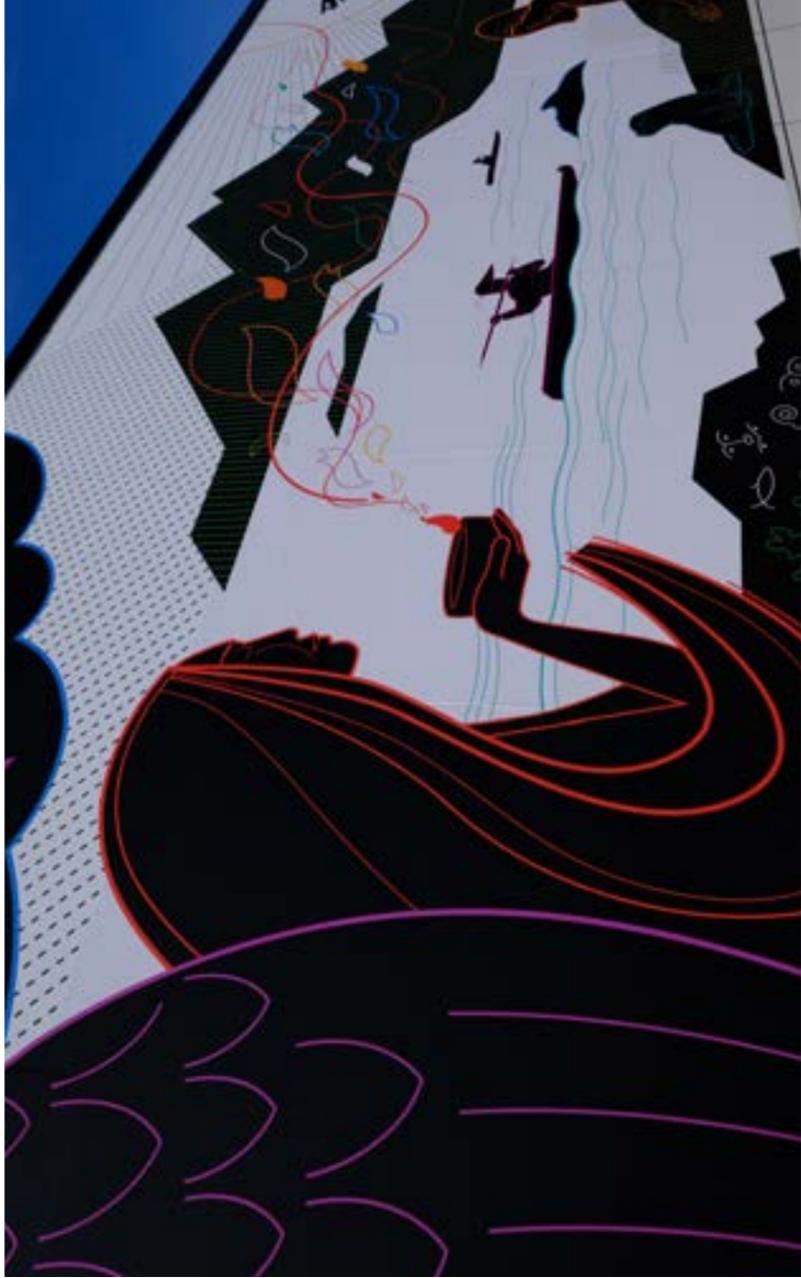
To learn more about caring for archaeological sites and artifacts, please visit the historic preservation page of our website, where you can download helpful resources.

Finding Artifacts

There is a new piece of artwork on display at the Alutiitq Museum. The Fire of Living Culture is a stunning outdoor mural installed on our new addition. The 13 by 35 foot work was created by Sugpiaq artist Todd Metrokin. Metrokin grew up in Kodiak and is known for telling stories with his designs. The mural mixes local scenery and cultural images—a woman holding a burning naniq-oil lamp, men paddling kayaks, the cultural hero Raven, a berry picker, and a float plane to show the continuing story of the Alutiitq people. The museum selected Metrokin's design through a competitive process supported by the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association and the US Forest Service.

"My design concept connects our past to our future—from creation (represented by the raven) to our ancestors to modern life and beyond—through the enduring flame of the naniq (oil lamp)", said Metrokin. "The naniq's flame echoes through time and grows richer in colors as it reflects a culture continuing to grow. This represents the resilience of our people and is meant to act as a counterpoint to the notion that our culture is only a reflection of the past. It is a living, evolving blend of experiences, knowledge, and creativity that we bring forward and enrich with each generation."

The mural was part of an effort to guide visitors to the museum. In the past, people have had trouble finding the museum. This large, vibrant piece of public art, filled with cultural imagery, celebrates Alutiitq traditions and makes the building more recognizable.



The Fire of Living Culture, 2025. Digital artwork by Todd Metrokin. AM104. Produced with support from the American Indian Alaska Native Association.

Building Mural

Suaruat—Puppets

There's a new gang at the museum—a family of eight suaruat—puppets with stories to tell! We produced this cute set of toys for our traveling education box. Who are the Alutiitq. The box helps teachers introduce the Alutiitq world to students, and the puppets are tied to a writing and storytelling lesson. Students learn about individual puppets and then write stories about the puppets to share with their class or incorporate into a puppet show.

There are eight characters in the puppet set. Artist Susan Malutin outfitted each one with clothing, jewelry, and tattoos. Each puppet also comes with a biography discussing their role in Alutiitq society.

Armaq—the woman, wears a decorated skin parka and has chin tattoos and earrings. She talks about her daily chores and explains the meaning of her tattoos. Pisurno—the hunter wears a gutskin jacket and a bentwood visor. He explains the importance of his clothing for sea mammal hunting.

The puppets provide a fun, friendly way to learn about Alutiitq families and lifestyles. They are a great place for students to start exploring Alutiitq traditions. You can find the puppet biographies, lesson plan, and information on borrowing the education box on the traveling boxes page of our website. The puppet set was inspired by a similar set produced by Chugachmiut. They were produced with support from the Munarriet Project and the Alaska State Council on the Arts.