



# Nacaq – HEADDRESS



*JJ Orloff models a nacaq made by June Simeonoff Pardue. Purchased for the Alutiiq Museum with support from Rasmuson Foundation.*

Headdresses were once part of the elaborate clothing worn at Alutiiq/Sugpiaq winter festivals. Participants in these events displayed their prosperity with beautifully crafted garments. The materials and decorative elements used in clothing reflected their wearer’s age, gender, and social position. Wealthy Alutiiq people wore elegantly decorated parkas of valuable sea otter, fox, or ground squirrel pelts. Headdresses, jewelry, and tattoos added to the appearance of prestige conveyed by these rich materials. The less affluent wore simple clothing of common materials like bird skins. Whatever your status, your clothes provided a link to the spiritual world. Alutiiq people kept their garments clean, well repaired, and nicely decorated to show respect for the creatures that supported human life.

Women’s headdresses were typically made from hundreds of glass beads strung on sinew and embellished with feathers colored with cranberry or blueberry juice. Strands of small beads were tied into a tight-fitting cap with many dangling lengths attached to the sides and the back. These attachments often featured larger, heavier beads that swayed, glittered, and jingled as the wearer moved. In Prince William Sound,

the daughters of Alutiiq chiefs wore headdresses of beads and dentalium shells that extended far down their bodies, sometimes reaching their heels. Beaded headdresses were often accompanied by matching earrings, chokers, necklaces, sashes, and belts. Teenage girls and young women wore these lavish ornaments to symbolize their passage into adulthood.

Men also wore headdresses. These garments were hood-shaped, and although they might include beads, they lacked the long strings associated with women’s *nacaq*. Some were made of ermine skins, decorated with feathers, pieces of animal hair, strips of leather and gut skin, and embellished with embroidery.

Today, headdresses remain a part of traditional dress. Alutiiq people wear them for performances, events, and special occasions.

## **LEARN MORE:**

*Nacaq, How to Make a Kodiak Alutiiq Beaded Headdress, 2022, by Kayla McDermott, Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak.*