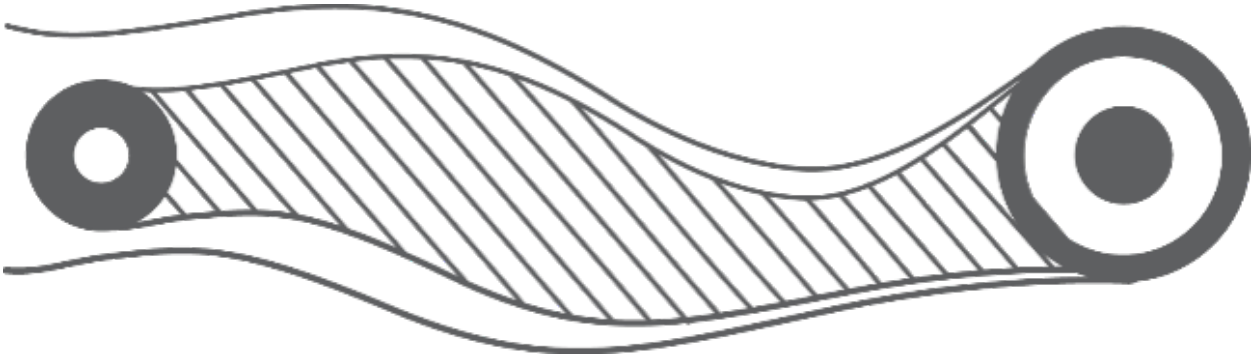
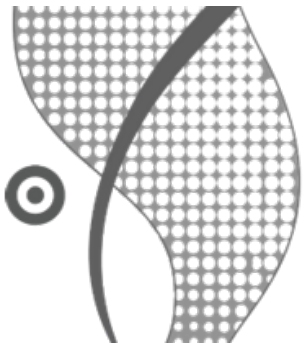


ALASKA NATIVE MUSEUM SOVEREIGNTY GUIDE

Case studies, experiences & work towards equity with Alaska Native peoples



Introduction: Museums and Alaska Native Cultural Belongings
Nadia Jackinsky-Sethi, PhD

Material culture has served as a customary medium for Indigenous peoples to pass on cultural practices and knowledge since time immemorial. Art forms such as masks, baskets, regalia, tools, carvings, and many other examples of material culture hold knowledge, memories and stories that connect generations past, present and future. They contain elements of who we are and how we identify ourselves.

Much of Alaska's historic material culture is held within museums spread throughout the world. In some cases, these belongings have been displaced and forgotten, in other instances they are remembered and deeply missed. Some collections are difficult to track down, while others are available for study through digital means or visiting exhibitions. Despite the challenges with access, material culture continues to tell important stories for our communities. The study of material culture can inspire and teach new generations important information about cultural heritage, design elements, aesthetic principles, construction techniques and technologies.

Historically museums have collected, exhibited, and cared for materials without much involvement from Alaska Native communities. Thankfully, we are in a period where this is changing. Today museums acknowledge that their role not merely to collect and display existing artifacts, but also to help communities revive and remember art forms and to hold space for community engagement. There is much work to do to make space for Alaska Native voices & perspectives to be shared in these spaces.

This guidebook is intended to share tips and suggestions for museums that care for Alaska Native material culture to communicate ideas about how to best work with Alaska Native communities. Organized thematically, it provides chapters with topic overviews accompanied by case studies.

The guidebook was created in partnership with the Alaska Native Museum Sovereignty Advisory circle, a collective of Alaska Native arts leaders,

museum professionals and artists from throughout Alaska, organized by The CIRI Foundation (TCF).[1] Additional funding support for project development was provided through a grant from the Alaska Humanities Forum in 2019. The views shared within this guide do not claim to speak for all Alaska Native peoples, but advocate for all Alaska Native peoples to have respectful representation within museum spaces that care for our collective material heritage. As an electronic resource, this guidebook was created so that it can be expanded and updated as we grow our knowledge and experiences. Please consider this as a living document that will change and grow.

This handbook is built on the concept of museum sovereignty, a concept that recognizes that Indigenous arts and material culture are an expression of cultural sovereignty. Museum sovereignty encompasses the idea that Indigenous people have the right to determine how our material culture is represented within museum spaces. Museum sovereignty asserts the right to access and care for examples of our material heritage. Museum Sovereignty reflects our way of being, doing, seeing, thinking through and within museum spaces. It considers that Indigenous communities have our own ideas about caretaking for material culture, our own way of sharing stories, and our own aesthetic preferences. It considers that Native peoples are experts in our own cultural histories and experiences.

Museum sovereignty has the following goals:

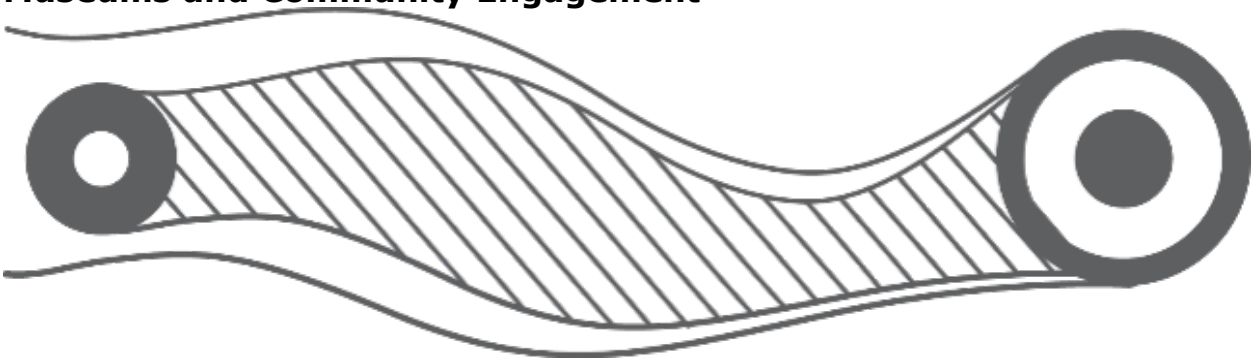
- Sharing Indigenous art and stories using Indigenous perspectives & voices;
- Increasing research and interpretation on historical collections held in museum repositories by Indigenous community members;
- Helping to provide access to historical collections;
- Helping museums understand the ongoing importance of historical materials to living communities today.

What does museum sovereignty look like in practice? It looks like Indigenous people being welcomed into museum spaces as experts in our own cultural histories. It looks like intergenerational knowledge sharing taking place within museums. It looks like Indigenous peoples caring for our cultural belongings using our own protocols and community values.

For museums that use this guidebook, we invite you to be open to new ideas and to building new partnerships with Alaska Native community members.

[1]This resource was also inspired by other resources that exist that advocate for culturally appropriate collections care in museums such as the 2019 School of Advanced Research's "Guidelines for Collaboration" (https://guidelinesforcollaboration.info), and the 2019 Australia Council For the Arts' "Protocols for Using First Nationals Cultural and Intellectual Property in the Arts."

ACTIVATING COLLECTIONS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Museums and Community Engagement



Indigenous people have often played a secondary role in museum activities. We are sometimes invited to sit on advisory boards or committees, but often have no real power in decision making. We are sometimes asked to participate in exhibition development, but often only at the last minute. In some cases, we are not fully recognized for our roles. Real collaboration and partnership mean more than just including Indigenous peoples. It means working together with long-term goals and working with a sense of equality in decision making. It is important that Indigenous people are included in decisions regarding how our communities are represented, and how our tangible and intangible cultural heritage is used and shared.

Developing positive and meaningful relationships within communities takes time. It means being respectful, thoughtful, and inclusive. This work pays off in building strong relationships that are grounded in trust and respect. For museums, sometimes this is an exercise in ceding authority, but it is also an opportunity to build relationships and grow understanding.

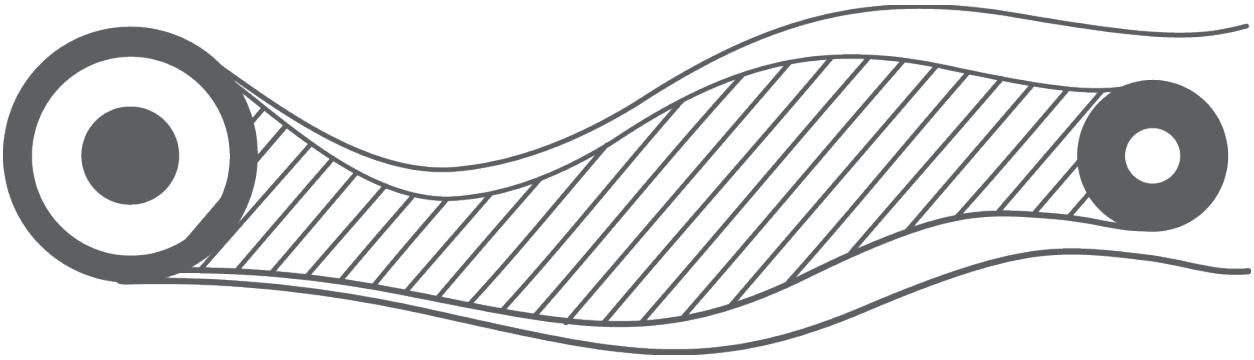
Tips for Community Engagement

- Include Alaska Native people in all aspects of museum work including planning, research, and design of projects. Include funds in project budgets to support project advisors.
- When appropriate, contact the local tribal council and ask for permission prior to starting a project that involves community. Ask for suggestions for community partners who can help to make connections within the community.
- If a community is not receptive to the project that is proposed, be prepared to take no for an answer.
- When visiting a community, come with an open mind, and be prepared to listen. A community might be sensitive to activities that have happened in the past that were exploitative, and trust might not come quickly. Consider asking community members for advice on working to acknowledge past wrongs.

- Reciprocal relationships are important. If you are asking for personal information from community members, be prepared to share information about where you come from too. Consider ways that you can offer reciprocity, this may be in the form of payment, or a gift.
- Offer reimbursement for services so that collaborators feel fairly compensated for their time and knowledge. If offered a ride, consider paying for gas. If attending a community event, consider bringing food to share.
- Communication styles: In some communities in Alaska, silence is valued and there are pauses between conversations. Some cultures have a stricter sense of time, and meetings may not happen in a timeline that is anticipated. In some communities, some information is restricted based on gender. Be flexible and understanding of a community's communication preferences and understand that agendas may need to change.
- Ask for permission before using a recording device, photographing someone, or taking notes.
- If inviting community members to visit your institution, make an effort to create a welcoming environment. If a person is visiting from out of town, offer a tour of your community. Provide food and refreshments. Create an agenda that is flexible and gives people time to reflect and spend time with collections on their own.
- Access: Provide access to information about what is available in your institution to the communities that are represented.
- After you have completed your work, share what you produce and give credit where due. Plan to make time for community feedback before finalizing your work.
- Once a project is completed, stay in touch with the community to build opportunities for future collaborations.

Guiding Questions:

- Is your institution accessible and welcoming to Indigenous peoples?
- Does your institution have workspace for Indigenous peoples that is comfortable and safe?
- Whose voices and experiences are represented in your institution?
- How is your institution listening to and engaging with community?
- Who should you collaborate/co-create with?
- How does your institution recognize and support Indigenous knowledge systems?



Collections as Source by Melissa Shaginoff

I visited my first museum collections as a student at the Institute of American Indian Arts, where I studied painting. I was part of a collaborative program between my school and the National Museum of the American Indian—a program designed to increase access to collections while un-prescriptively introducing collections research methods to undergraduate artists. At the time, I considered it a free trip to DC and perhaps an idea for my next painting. I was unaware of the transformative impact the experience would have on my life and career today. I realize, looking back, that I didn't feel like I deserved the opportunity. My family never visited museums; in fact, they actively avoided them, and I, by extension, believed I wasn't smart enough and certainly not cultural enough to be someone selected to view these "artifacts" beyond their museum exhibition. When I arrived, I was given the tour by collections staff and volunteers. They had carefully laid out the collections that met my minimal research knowledge of two searchable terms, "Ahtna" and "Athabascan." Regardless of the lack of searchable terms, I will never forget the power and connection I felt to those collections. Before this experience, I would have considered collections to be distant from myself, inanimate objects from which I could inferentially draw from their visual surface. After, I felt very close to the objects. They became alive and mine; many people in the museum field today adeptly refer to them as cultural belongings.

From that moment, my belongings shifted my whole course of study and are now the source of my art, curation, activism, and connection to land, animals, and my community. I share this because I believe work in collections, curation, and other museum fields must also shift and examine their purpose. Realizing the effect of what we do can entirely change how someone views their culture and themselves. Many institutions are doing this, reflecting on the goals of their programs, the perspectives of their curation, the systemic barriers of their institutions, and the settler-colonial power inequities within our communities and country. But there is still much

work to be done. We can start by examining our experiences as Indigenous people, allies, and those with the power and privilege from the mere fact of working within the museum field in the first place. When we look at collections work, what should be the primary concern in the field? Considering both the historical context of institutions and the specific context of individual institutions. While this broad question draws broad answers, for me, access is the foundation of Indigenous work within the museum field. Cultural belongings can help teach us about ourselves and the ways in which colonialism and settler colonialism have erased, blurred, and continue to eradicate who we are. What purpose do our belongings serve in our lives if we cannot even see them? So how, as those who work in the museum field, do we facilitate Indigenous communion with their cultural belongings?

First, we must demystify, informalize, and humanize the process of requesting access to collections. For many people, access is not something individuals or tribal organizations are even aware they can request, or the process of request is not transparent/adequately publicized by the institution. This is the problem of the institution. I often hear that individuals and or tribes wanting access should continuously "knock on the door" until someone within the institution opens it. This cannot be our position if we work within an institution. We must consider our work a responsibility to create moments for people to build relationships with their belongings by building our own relationships with individuals and or tribes.

Second, we need to stretch our ideas of conservation and care of collections. The notion that cultural belongings should be "conserved" beyond our lives inherently creates limits in which individuals and or tribes can interact with their cultural belongings. Assessing the risk and reward when they are exhibited and or shared needs to be something that the individuals and or tribes participate in. We should have a say in how our belongings are conserved and cared for. Maybe our drums need to be played to continue living.

Third, we need to embrace the direction from Indigenous peoples when considering return, repatriation, and rematriation of our cultural belongings. We must do so in ways that limit the retraumatization of individuals and or tribes participating in these processes. People who work for museums must take on the majority of labor to return cultural belongings, including the paperwork and correspondence, the research into familial connection and or cultural patrimony, and the deaccessioning of cultural belongings from collections. While this work might seem tiresome and slow-moving, committing to seeing it through is also deeply acknowledging of the sovereignty Indigenous people should have within the institutions that hold their cultural belongings. If we genuinely believe in return, then shouldn't

we, even in the face of institutional indifference, create opportunity for Indigenous people to decide where their cultural belongings live, if they go home, and where they are laid to return to the land?

These ideas only touch the surface of the present and potential in collections work. The various directions in which the field might grow are incredibly hopeful, but as an Indigenous person working for museums from the inside out, it is important to remain critical. To continue to question ways we all can do better as people who work for the institution, as well as dismantle, reconstruct, and heal from them. Because when we get the chance to experience our cultural belongings, it is clear. They are a powerful source to all that we are.

Melissa Shaginoff at the National Museum of the American Indian, 2014

Experiencing Collections with Elders by Joel Isaak

As young elementary students, we made paper Indian "costumes" to wear for Thanksgiving. I did not think of it as a costume. I knew how to hand sew and just thought it was cool to have the chance to make some type of Native clothing and it made me want to learn how to make Dena'ina clothing. I knew I was Dena'ina and I thought I was making a paper version of actual Native clothing out of paper, with one exception. I did not want to wear the Peter Pan-esque feather on my head. This desire to learn to make Dena'ina clothing led me to conduct research in museum collections across the country and access museum collections around the world. I made my first traditional style of Dena'ina clothing in cast bronze after researching and learning all the authentic material traditions our clothing is made from.

I started apprenticing with Dena'ina Elder first language speaker Helen McLean in 2010 while conducting research on salmon skin at the University of Alaska Museum of the North in Fairbanks, Alaska. This was the first time I had accessed the museum collection, and I showed the photograph of salmon skin boots to Helen. We talked about the collection, and I asked her about the images and what she had made and grew up wearing. Her Chida (grandma) used to wear fish skin boots and make fish skin boots for Helen. Chida would use fish head grease to keep her boots waterproof. We joke about going berry picking and bear hunting at the same time when wearing those boots.

As has been the tradition since contact, the objects from our lives as Dena'ina people are being collected and kept away from the loving and living environments they are intended for. When we make objects that come from the land, that are produced in our homes with our families, and used in our material culture, they are imbued with life. The objects have connections and purposes of their own. However, when these objects leave the community, they take on a different life, often at a cost to our people and our way of life.

As Indigenous people, we have been largely removed from seeing our material culture in use in our day-to-day lives. My approach to researching museum collections has been to honor the ancestral legacy of the objects in the collection by learning how to make those objects and use them as they are intended to be used. After researching museum collections in Alaska, the Burke Museum, and the Harvard Peabody Museums, I brought photographs back home to show Helen and other Elders. I realized it was critical that I start bringing Helen and other Elders with me to research collections as much as possible.

Nothing can replicate seeing and listening Elders interact with, handle, sing to, and talk about the objects in the collection. The materials are intended to be lived with and interacted with. Conservation techniques have improved based on the knowledge these Elders have shared with the museums. Conservation takes on several meanings from the Elders' perspective. There is preserving the material object, there is maintaining the Elders' knowledge and memory that surrounds the object and conserving the knowledge of how to make use of the object by showing the next generation how to make, care for, and learn about the ancestral connection to these objects as part of a living tradition.

I have worked with Elders who have covertly taken apart museum objects to learn how they are constructed and then the Elder puts them back together again before anyone can see them. The outcome is a technique that has not been used in a hundred years being brought back into practice. Our work has updated and corrected erroneous documentation in museum catalogs. I saw the excitement on their faces as they can remember stories they had forgotten for 50 years or longer. Pride and peace fill their faces as they handle materials the way their hands remember, playing a drum that has not been touched in decades or touching and draping a garment to show it is constructed and how we take care of our children.

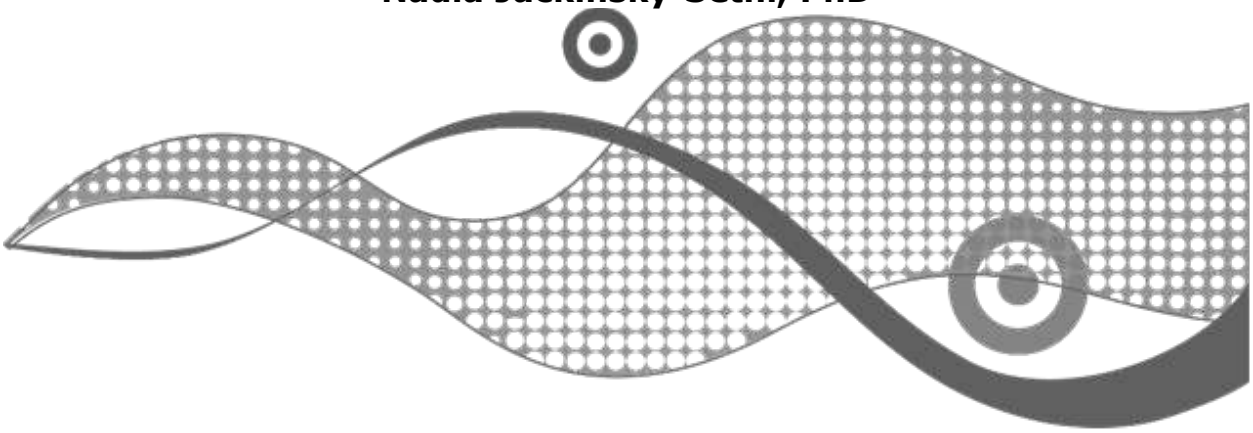
Perhaps the most powerful lesson learned is not the process of material traditions but one of reclamation of being considered human and no longer being subjugated as savages. We belong in these spaces and are the authorities of our people. Looking at bone scrapers brings up stories of why we don’t see them anymore outside of the museum. Once our villages rang with the sound of hides being scraped, drums being played, wood being carved, and songs being sung.

The amazing beautiful vibrant objects we live with did not use to be endangered or rarefied. The question of why we do not see these things anymore gets raised over and over by Museum staff and non-Indigenous researchers. The Elders discuss the answer as they talk about the objects they are reviewing. The answer can be synthesized as follows: we as children, our children, and grandchildren were separated by compulsory K-12 education. This greatly interrupted the Indigenous education system that ensures that these material traditions carried on and destroyed the necessary community needed to make our cultural objects. Combined with the academic, religious, and governmental institution collection tactics rooted in theft and cash-based economic systems further removed our material culture from our care making them rarefied, exotic, and geographically dispersed far away from our homelands.

Working with Elders in museum collections requires trust and openness from staff. Not all museums do provide the willingness to handle facing the darkness of this truth, however, there is so much to be learned from working with Elders in museum collections. Elders are the utmost authority on these objects, and I have experienced the power of seeing our community grow in knowing who we are as people, not being ashamed of who we are, and confidence to take back our ways of life in part because of this type of collaborative work.

Helen Dick and Joel Isaak, harvesting birch bark (2020)

Exploring Heritage Collections with my Daughter
Nadia Jackinsky-Sethi, PhD



When my daughter Pearl was a toddler, I worked as the curator of collections at the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka, Alaska. The museum holds an incredible assemblage of Alaska Native material culture, mostly collected during the late nineteenth century. Pearl would accompany me to work sometimes out of necessity, since my work week was Tuesday through Saturday, and no childcare centers were available on the weekends. She took naps in the collection storage area. She was present at all of the visiting artist lectures that I hosted during evening hours. She accompanied me to a *koo.eex* where we brought clan belongings out from museum storage to be present in the ceremony. Her presence made me think about museums through a different lens—what does Pearl see in these spaces? How does she experience the work on the walls? How can I make the space where I work more welcoming to her? Do we need to find a stool so that she can stand tall enough to see what is in the cases? I have always included her in my research, asking her questions like: Is this exhibition representing our culture accurately? What do you think this mask was used for? What do you think this design represents?

As she has aged, Pearl has accompanied me on many museum visits--the Anchorage Museum, the Alutiiq Museum, the Seattle Art Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. One particularly meaningful visit for us was spending time together at the back collections of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City when I was lucky enough to serve as a visiting research fellow one summer. On my final day of my study, the staff kindly allowed me to bring her with me to open drawers and explore the collections on our own. Among the many treasures from our home region that are held here is a small collection of beaded Alutiiq jewelry: A precious headdress, beaded earrings, and necklaces. These materials were significant for us because in our home community there are very few historical examples of our material culture available to visit. As a result of aggressive

collecting during Alaska's early period of colonization, historical arts from our area are more plentiful in far flung places like Germany, France, Russian and England.

Opening the drawers and seeing these Alutiiq belongings far from home, we greeted them. It felt like a gift to be able to share a moment of being in the presence of precious materials made by our ancestors. We wondered what life was like for the woman who made these and what hardships she faced. Pearl admired the beautiful designs, looked at me and asked, "Why are these here?" This opened the door for a long conversation about the history of collecting in Alaska, the challenges that our community members faced during Alaska's colonial period and the importance of reconnecting to our heritage.

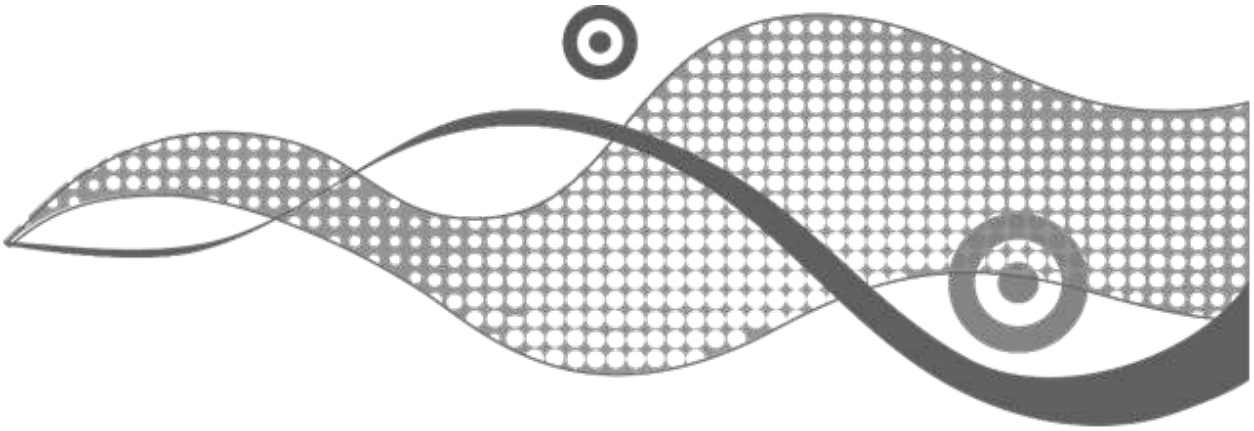
Since this museum experience, we have visited stone oil lamps from collections at the Smithsonian Institution, and then returned home to visit the island where they were taken from. Following our family's moose harvest, we visited the Anchorage Museum and examined collections made from moose parts with a conversation around the ingenuity of using brains for tanning, sinews for sewing, and feeling awe in thinking about the time, labor and love that went into creating the moose hide garments on display. I hope that the experience of exploring museum collections with my daughter has taught her that she belongs in these spaces and that she is connected to the materials that are housed within them. Actively involving Pearl in museum work has not only created exposure for her to see and know heritage collections, but also hopefully helps her be seen as someone who uses the space and who cares deeply about the materials that are housed within them. I hope museums will see her as a patron, someone they should respect and consider when designing exhibitions, when caring for collections, when considering how to build collections, when interpreting collections. Sharing museum spaces with my daughter has changed the way that I work in museums and the way that I think about how museums should present collections. At the Sheldon Jackson Museum, I developed a children's corner within the gallery where children could read books on topics relevant to the collections on display, and open a drawer to handle hands-on materials. With my colleague, Mary Goddard, we commissioned her mother, Jennie Wheeler, to make Tlingit regalia for an American Girl doll that young visitors could play with. I invited visiting Alaska Native artists to bring their children with them to engage with collections in the storage area.

Today I no longer work at the Sheldon Jackson Museum, but when working on museum projects as a consultant, I am mindful of encouraging the museums that I work with to consider how to create spaces that are accessible to children. Sometimes this is making sure there is a stool so that cases can be seen from a child's eye level or thinking about how to include

activities that engage children's curiosity or thinking through how to include parent artists and their children in the process of museum research visits. Importantly, it also must include integrating stories that are relevant to Indigenous children so that they see themselves represented and belonging within these spaces.

I hope that as the museum world continues to change and grow, we can encourage museums to find more ways to connect with youth. In turn, our youth will grow up with connections to collections that will stay with them as they grow into future Elders.[1]

Pearl Sethi with Alutiiq headdress at the American Museum of Natural History, June 2019



Gheshdnu yuh Ch'akyasht "Working within Museums" Aaron Leggett

For over 15 years I have had the opportunity to visit and or work with most of the major museums that have significant Alaska Native collections. These include the National Museum of Finland, the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, the National Museum of Denmark, the British Museum, the Kuskamera in Saint Petersburg Russia, the American Museum of Natural History, the Burke Museum in Seattle, The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of American Indian and the Field Museum. As one of the few Alaska Native curators working in the field, I believe that I bring a unique perspective from both a Native and museum perspective.

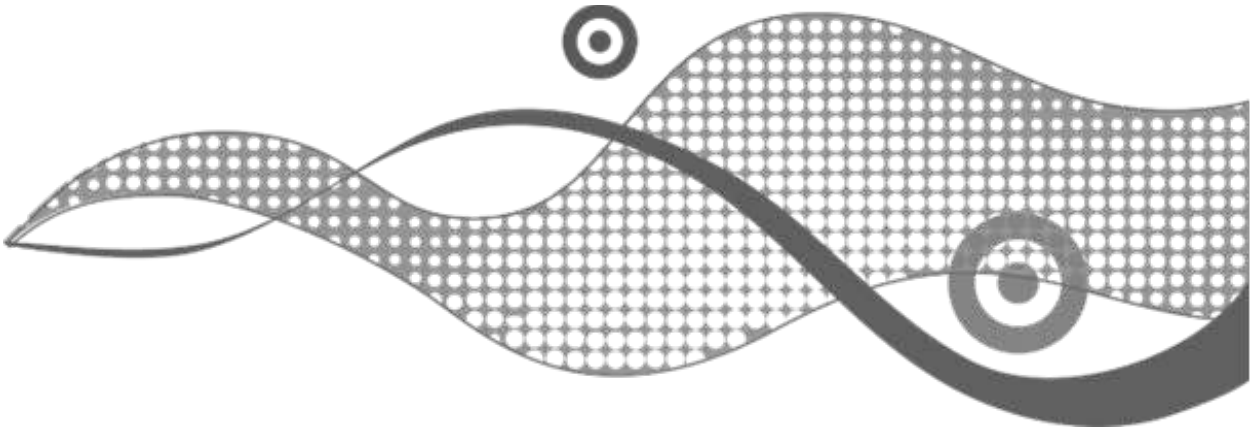
In thinking about my work with a wide variety of museums and what makes for productive working relationship, I would say that it can be boiled down to trust. There must be trust from the museums that working with source communities is not only the right thing to do but that it also strengthens the objects that museums care for by connecting these objects with the communities. Community members often can share key insights about the use and meaning of collections which was not captured when they were originally collected.

From a Native perspective, it is important to understand how materials have ended up in museums. Sadly, far too often there is a dark story to the collection history, such as grave robbing or museum collectors taking from communities that they believed to be "abandoned" when in fact the people were still living in the area but were away when the collector arrived. Another common collection story is the intervention of the local priest who admonished the people for having items that they deemed pagan and put intense pressure on the people to get rid of these items, then in turn either donating or selling these items to collectors from outside the region.

I also believe that it is important to remember that not all items were collected in a negative manner and that in many cases people who sold items because we as Native people have always bartered for items that we

desired that we not available locally to us. For example, when it comes to my people, the Dena'ina, the vast majority of the items held in museums are summer shirts, pants and dresses made from tanned caribou or moose hide and elaborately decorated with woven porcupine quills and silverberry seeds. This type of clothing was worn up until the end of the 19th century, when western clothing replaced it, aside from footwear. The reason I believe that there is abundance of this type of material is due to a couple of factors. First, I believe that the outsiders who came in and collected it deemed it to be unique and worth collecting for museums but I also believe that from a Dena'ina perspective we were willing to trade or sell these items because Western clothing and trade items like glass beads were both a status symbol but also that it function as good if not better than what we had and didn't require the time consuming process it took to make the tunics and dresses or process dye and weave porcupine quills. And the last reason I believe that this material appears in such abundance may be because most of the collecting was done during the summer when the Dena'ina were living in fish camps away from the winter villages. Inversely in looking at all of these collections, winter clothing especially winter parkas are almost non-existent. I believe that the most important reason they don't show up in museum collections is that Dena'ina recognized that their winter clothing was vastly superior to the winter clothing that was available at that time, and they were not willing to trade these items away. Interestingly, the only exception to winter clothing that we did find were some smaller items like gloves, boots and hats which were still worn and being produced for sale in some Dena'ina villages into later part of the 20th century. The reason that I bring this point up is because it is important to not take the agency away from our people and think that all items currently held by museums were somehow "stolen" and spirited away from our communities under the cover of night.

In writing this short essay it is my hope that Indigenous people and museums will continue to build their relationships together as they work to decolonize museums within the confines of what a museum is by its very nature. I truly believe that for this to happen there must be shared trust from both parties. This can take a while to build, but once it does, it creates enormous possibilities for both sides.



LANGUAGE MATTERS

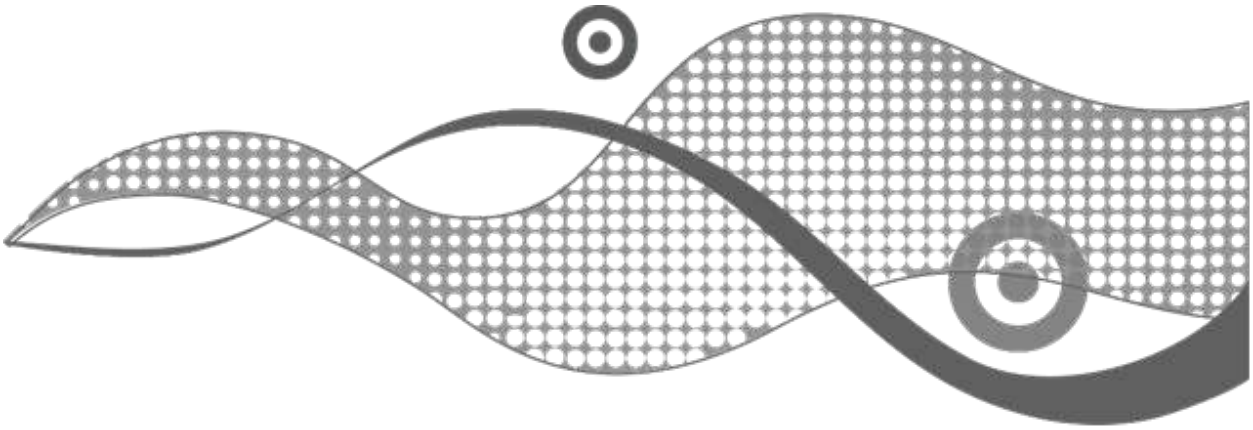
The words and names that we use matter. Individual terms can reference family, geography, and specific histories. Names can also reference colonial events and when used incorrectly can be painful reminders of traumatic histories. Words such as *Eskimo*, *Indian* and *Aleut* are all examples of terms that were introduced as a result of colonization. The use of these terms is considered offensive by many community members who prefer to use names that originate within our own languages (examples are Sugpiaq, Iñupiaq or Unangan). How can museums use language that is more inclusive in museum records and labels? The most respectful choice is to use terms that are locally employed and identified through community collaboration.

The Use of Indigenous Languages in Museum Records:
Alaska has twenty officially recognized Indigenous languages, many of which have additional dialects. The use of Alaska's Native languages has been discouraged in the past as a result of governmental policies that forbade the use of Alaska Native languages. To reverse language loss and encourage Indigenous language normalization and revitalization, museums should encourage the use of Alaska Native languages within museum spaces.

Using Indigenous languages within museum sends a powerful message about Indigenous presence and authority and provides an opportunity to educate audiences about the rich diversity of Alaska's language traditions. It also creates an atmosphere that showcases living history and gives visitors an opportunity to experience an important aspect of Indigenous culture that they might not otherwise experience within a museum setting.

Tips for Language Use:

- Ask local community members about preferred terms to use in museum records.
- Be aware of the colonial history attached to terms.
- Avoid lumping all Alaska Native people together, and instead recognize that there are distinct tribal nations and cultural groups.
- Use capitalization when writing "Indigenous" and "Alaska Native."
- Be flexible. The process of changing how language is used in a museum can be slow, and mistakes may be made along the way. Be prepared to revise museums records as you learn more about using Indigenous languages and terminology.
- Experiment with pilot programs or other activities that can add awareness of Alaska Native languages and naming practices.



Care Activation at the Field Museum by Emily Johnson

In 2019 Emily Johnson (Yup'ik) sought to draw attention to the use of the term "Eskimo" in the Chicago Field Museum through language 'activation.' She used black electrical tape to cover over the word Eskimo on the museum wall labels.

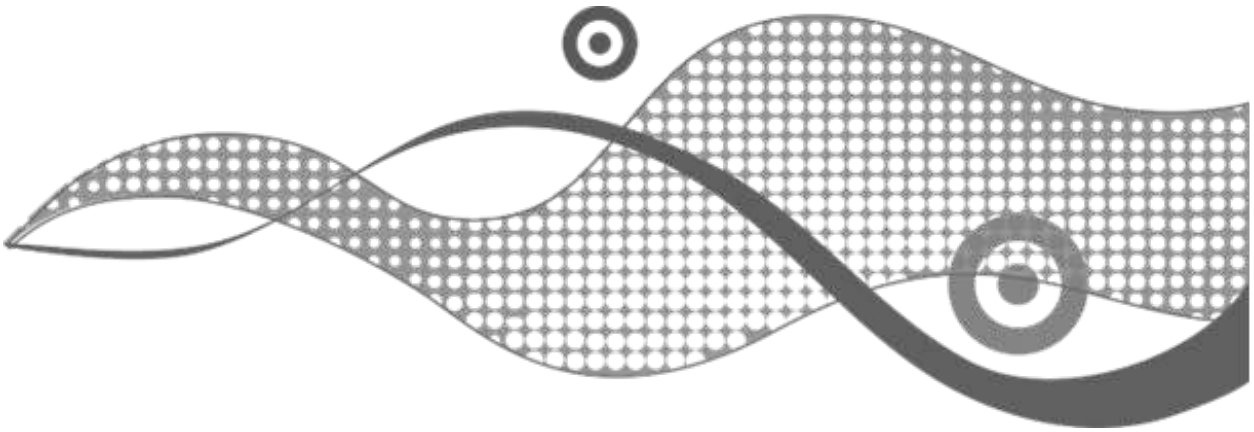
When I walk into this hall, I greet my ancestors. This is my first priority. Then, I want to break them out of these cages. Every ancestor, every belonging here needs to be sung to, fed, talked with, prayed for, healed – in a different way. I do not know all the ways.

I do know every ancestor, every one of our belongings needs to be sent home. I also know the word "Eskimo" hurts my ears. And it hurts my heart. And it hurts to see it written so many times in this hall.

I want for my ancestors here, for my people who come into this hall - and for those of you who are non-Indigenous, too - to be relieved of bearing the violence, the racism, and the hurt of seeing, hearing, and feeling this made

up word that was forced upon us - and continues to be forced upon us in settler-colonial spaces such as this one.

I am Yup’ik. We call ourselves Yup‘ik. Every ancestor, every belonging in this hall comes from a specific people, a specific part of the world, a specific ground, a specific land, a specific culture, a specific language. These are the names we need to see, hear, and feel in this hall – the names we choose for ourselves.



Mapping the Landscape: Exhibiting Indigenous place names in Southern Southeast Alaska, by Brandon Castle

Exhibition case at Totem Heritage Center in Ketchikan Alaska, Photo courtesy Brandon Castle

Background

The Totem Heritage Center in Ketchikan, Alaska houses one of the world's largest collections of 19th century totem poles. The Center was established in 1976 to house a collection of over thirty-five totem poles retrieved from nearby Tlingit and Haida village sites. The totem poles represent a range of cultural knowledge including oral histories, family lineage, and the importance of cultural continuation more broadly. These poles were subject to impacts of colonization in the region including theft, vandalism, and a lack of understanding of what poles represent for Native communities. Inaccurate interpretations and harmful stereotypes carried over to numerous facets of settler society and shaped how people engaged with the land they were colonizing and in turn, naming.

Mapping a Landscape

Today, when looking at a map of Southeast Alaska, town names such as Craig, Petersburg, Prince of Wales Island, Juneau, and Revillagegaido Island all originate from foreign names and claims to the land. At the Totem Heritage Center, a Forest Service map from the 1970's served as the main visual for the 'full' picture Southeast Alaska. Each town and village site included interpretive labels, many of which did not include Indigenous

perspectives, and if they did, were rife with inaccuracies and misspellings. And understandably so. Indigenous perspectives were intentionally excluded from the mapped landscape to make way for development and authority.

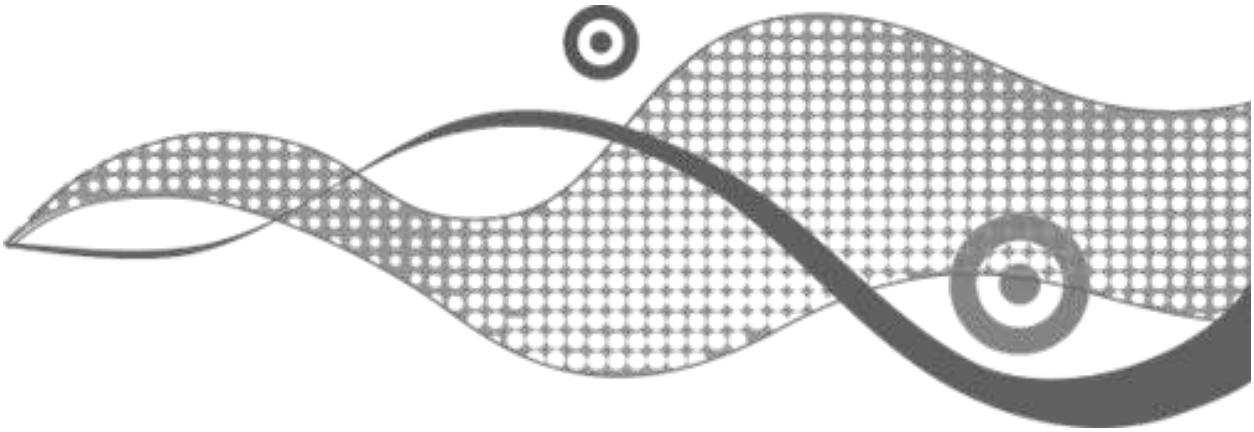
A New Map: Exhibit development process

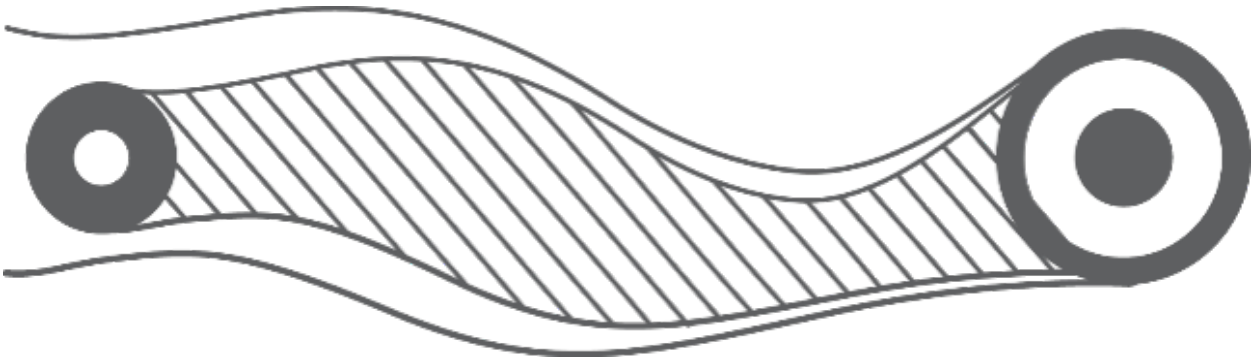
In the summer of 2020, the Curator of Exhibits Ryan McHale and I approached the Forest Service map in the main gallery with several key questions in mind: what would this map look like if the perspective was shifted? Which stories of the land are being excluded from this map? What kinds of information is this map sharing in general? These questions led us to the conclusion that it was time for a revamp. A map where Indigenous perspectives of the land were brought to the forefront as the main perspective and where the impacts of colonial interactions with the land were addressed. We felt it was time to acknowledge the people whose land this has been since time immemorial and start to consider the generations of knowledge systems which places names are central to understanding relationships to the land.

To create a new map, we decided to focus on Southern Southeast Alaska and start with the original village sites the poles at the Center originated from. Through community engagement with advisors, consulting with primary resources, and in general concluding that the exhibit did not have to be a massive production and rather, understanding that the resources and materials already available to us were already telling a story. Through numerous iterations of the exhibit design, conversations with museum staff on available materials, and research of Indigenous place names in the area in the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian language; we completed the exhibit development process with a map that brings Indigenous perspectives to the forefront. Each label includes the Indigenous name of the city or village first, and then the colonial or ‘also referred to as’ name.

A major theme throughout the process was the understanding that the landscape is more than just what you see represented on a map. It is the people that live there, their stories, and cultures. We included Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian material culture including a dance paddle, fishing hooks, spoons, bowls, berry baskets, and a drum. The goal of incorporating materials was to bring the area to life, and a place where people have established a deep sense of life and knowledge of the land. The materials included in the exhibit were placed near the cultures and sites they came from to showcase that place is culture and culture is place. The core themes of the display included Gathering, Harvesting, and Travel all supported by materials, background information, and Indigenous place names.

This exhibit was made possible by community outreach, supportive museum staff, and collaboration with the local arts council for equipment. For this project, we got to dive into history of the land and research that has been informed by Indigenous communities across the region. Our main resources were ‘Haa Leelk’w Has Aaani Saax’u / Our Grandparents’ Names on the Land’ published by the Sealaska Heritage Institute in 2010 for place names in Indigenous languages. Overall, we were able to strengthen ties with the community and explicitly address the impacts that colonial mapping can have for Indigenous Peoples and how these connections have always been here and continue to inform us of how to be in relation to the land.





Digital Archives from an Indigenous Perspective by Sabena Allen

Concerns about museum collections in Alaska Native communities often involve the physical cultural belongings in these collections. However, museums extend far beyond the physical collections. Less discussed are digital collections, including photos and files storing this information. Often lauded as a better form of access, the realities of the digital must be interrogated in relation to longer museum histories. Issues regarding the digital are easy to erase because they are intangible and often normalized, for example through social media. As such, it is easy to assume the inherent benefit of the digital. However, it is important to instead take note of the potential concerns, ensure there are opportunities for community input and guidance, and finally, simply acknowledge that mistakes have been made in the past and that those need to be corrected going forward.

Issues of Access in the Digital Museum

Museums have a long history of extracting from Indigenous cultures, a practice that continues to this day. As a result, cultural belongings are inaccessible to community members. For Native peoples, the issue of access is not merely one of education but also one of sovereignty, survivance, and cultural practices. It involves not only the ability to view and research objects, but also issues of ownership and authority over what type of information is shared and how it is presented. Museums' forays into the digital only complicate this, creating new avenues for tribal authority, as well as cultural and legal sovereignty, to be undermined through digital reproductions. Issues that carry over into the digital are thus rooted in older museum practices. This includes the handling of cultural belongings and cultural information, offensive entries in online collections, lack of tribal control, and lack of community-specific engagement.

Main Issues with Digital Collections:

- Material culture and stories are separated in museums, including in digital archives, which makes it difficult for community members to interact with and learn about cultural belongings.
- Native value systems are not reflected in museums.
- Legacy data is constituted by terms that were once commonly used in museums but that are now recognized as offensive and were simply transferred over into the digital.[2] This legacy data perpetuates negative stereotypes to the non-Native public and makes it difficult for community members to interact with digital archives.
- Legacy data also makes it difficult to search databases as outdated terms or terms that do not circulate in Native communities are used.
- Although one major push in digitization is creating networks of information – wherein links could connect different archives and sources, thereby overriding some of the issues with museum archives and information listed above – this has not occurred in practice. Information is disjointed and often difficult to find.
- Virtual repatriation is a recent attempt at decolonizing museums. While digital copies can be useful for communities, this is not a substitute for physical repatriation.
- Communities also have little control over how images and information is presented, including sensitive or taboo images. Some cultural belongings are also not meant to be photographed (or at least not without permission) based on traditional law.
- Intellectual property law, like regular property law, has been used to dispossess Native peoples. Many items in museums are not properly attributed and are attributed to their collector rather than their maker.

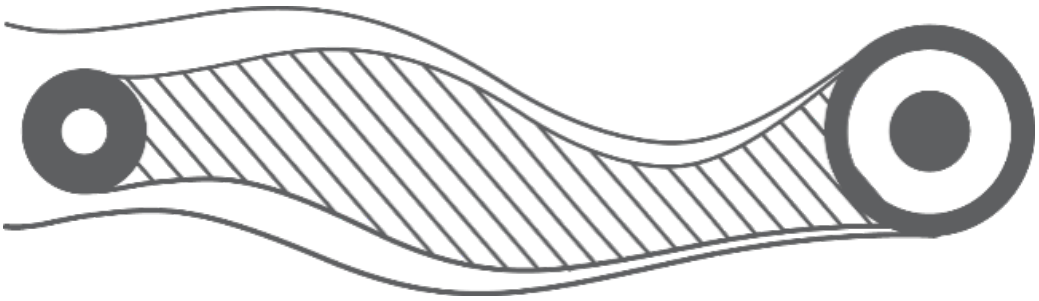
Suggestions for Improving Digital Engagement:

- Museums should work to educate visitors about legacy data while providing more appropriate terms moving forward.
- Community wishes and law should be respected in digital collections. This includes discussions about so-called "digital repatriation."
- Digital entries should also reflect community values.
- Rosita Worl[3] discusses precedents set through Tlingit sacred property. Clan owned property is not to be photographed for commercial use based on a 1969 agreement between the Kaagwaantaan Clan and the National Park Service. This is an important example because it shows that such laws about limited use, especially in the reproduction of at.óow through photography, have been used in agreements with Western institutions.

- Networks of information should be made more accessible to community members, while also keeping with community protocols on knowledge sharing.
- Jane Anderson and Kim Christen[4] have explored innovative ways for Indigenous peoples to assert control, including Traditional Knowledge (TK) Licenses and Labels, with an emphasis on proper learning on the part of institutions in accordance with Indigenous values. These labels assert community protocols surrounding cultural belongings, including attribution, use rights, and access. They are meant to be developed specifically in collaboration with communities.

Community Goals and Solutions: A Case Study

Research conducted in the summer of 2021 indicated that several Alaska Native artists were interested in the potential for interacting with museums on social media. One of the major issues with museum communication is that many people do not know that resources like digital archives exist. However, community members already run their businesses, cultural activities, and social lives on social media. There was interest in museums sharing their collections through social media, while also promoting artists who are working in similar mediums today. Additionally, collections shown would present communities the opportunity to interact, learn what is out there, and share their own information when appropriate. This would help artists to learn from ancestral materials, while also presenting museums an opportunity to learn from community members and practicing artists. Artists expressed the desire for reciprocal relationships with museums wherein the museum would become an active entity in the community. This would require museums to prioritize community input. What is most important when considering how to utilize digital platforms and technologies is that it should always be driven by community.



Working with Indigenous Artists in Museums

Indigenous artists often use museums as tools for artistic research, coming to a museum to study designs or to gain inspiration. In some cases, artists are invited to use a museum space as a visiting artist, resident artist or demonstrating artist. This practice can come with challenges, especially if an artist is new to working in a museum space. In some situations, an artist might find themselves as the only Indigenous person within a museum space and this can be lonely.

This section of the guidebook shares tips for museums to consider when hosting or working with Indigenous artists, followed by case studies from artists about their experiences working with and in museums:

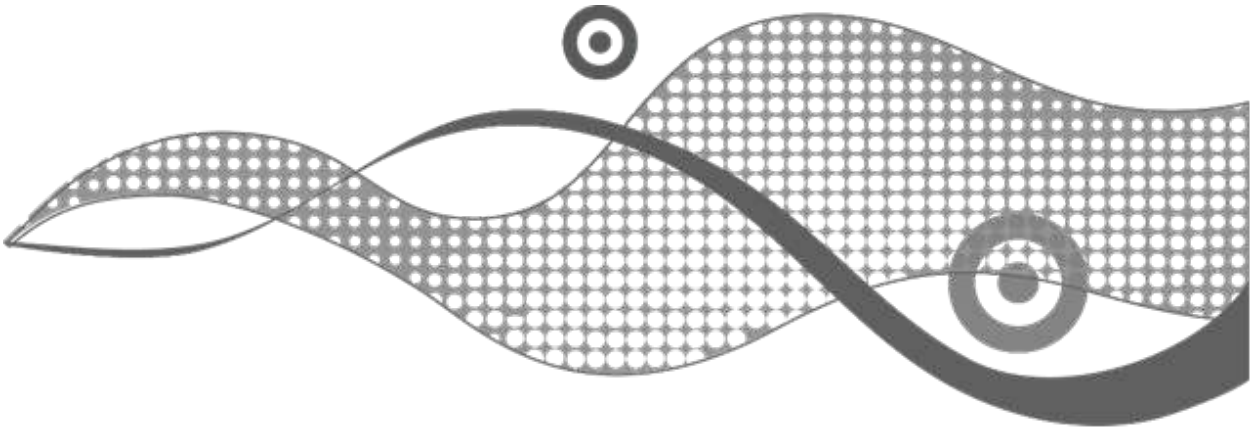
Tips for working with artists:

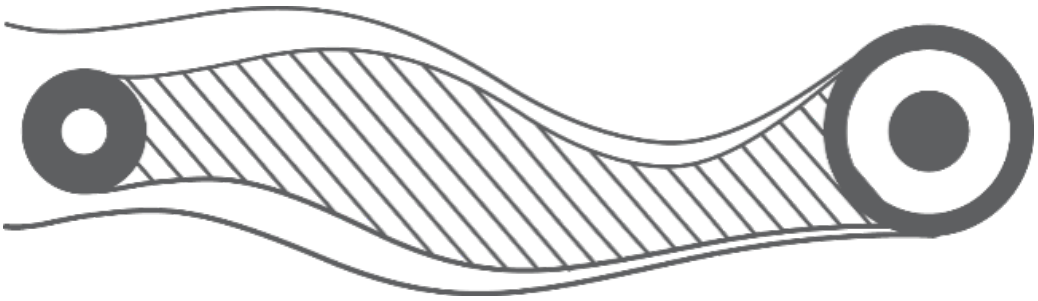
- Make sure to create a space where Indigenous artists feel safe and welcome. Does the artist have a place to go to rest during their time at your institution?
- Have you completed background work to learn some of the history, background, and culture of the artist(s) you are working with? Native people are accustomed to telling our stories, and explaining our histories, but this is labor. To be respectful, plan to learn about the culture, history, and background of the artist that you are working with before they arrive at your institution.
- Recognize that each artist is an individual. Try to avoid thinking of the artist who is working with your institution as an expect for all Indigenous issues or topics. Indigenous communities are diverse and full of individuals with their own experiences and level of knowledge.

Guiding Questions

- Are Indigenous artists being paid for their time and expertise at the same level as other artists that your institution works with?
- Does your institution have embedded hierarchies in how or where Indigenous materials are exhibited?

- Whose aesthetic preferences is your institution following when collecting or exhibiting works of art (do you have a diverse collections acquisition committee)? Are you collecting contemporary arts alongside historical arts?
- Who is writing the labels for the artwork on display and for what audience?
- Are you writing about Indigenous arts in the past tense?
- Do you have a cultural advisory committee to help guide the development of your programs?





Experiences in Collections by Sonya Kelliher-Combs

I think one of the most important things for museums to consider is the accessibility of collections. As an artist I have benefitted from being able to visit our ancestors' work in these spaces. By spending time in Nome at the Carrie McLain Museum I could see examples of pre-contact materials from our area and that was very impactful for my work and for me. On my first trip to Europe, I saw so much of our material culture in museums at these faraway places. I had no idea that so much of our history would be there: it changed my trajectory as an artist, and it became very important to me to spend time in collections.

The visits that I have had in museums have ranged from beautiful, positive experiences to negative ones. In one example, the museum staff that I was working with would not let me touch any of the collections. I think it was a lot about control and gate keeping. It was difficult knowing that these cultural belongings were made by my ancestors, but I was not allowed to touch them. Sometimes when visiting collections, it feels like the museum wants to mine information from visiting community members, and that can be uncomfortable too. In some cases, museum staff think that they know more about our cultures than we do, but they take information out of context. It makes me feel like I have to show a Western PhD in my own culture to have any of my qualifications recognized.

In another museum that I worked in, I had full access to collections, including the permission to touch cultural belongings. Interactions with the curator of collections were really positive. She asked what I wanted to see in advance of my visit. Also, I was sharing this experience with another artist, and that was so meaningful. It was more like a communal or familial experience. Sharing these experiences with others helps to further understanding of our material culture. I prefer to visit collections with others from my community.

In a recent project, I co-curated an exhibition about gut. The museum staff that I worked with never considered themselves all-knowing, and I was treated as an equal. The staff valued my knowledge and contributions. They

gave me space to make decisions and to select objects. This project was also successful because I was compensated well for my time, which does not happen often, and they supported programming beyond the exhibition to engage with the public.

When I think about how museums can do better at working with Indigenous communities, I know that museums should make sure we are included at the beginning of every project that involves us and our cultural belongings, history and ancestors. Invite our people not just to engage with our material culture but allow them to create community in museums; for example, allow them to share the space for cultural programs like dance practices and community visiting. Consider making opportunities for multigenerational people to work together at museums. It is not hard to include this kind of work. Museums need to demonstrate that they are invested in the communities they work in. They need to think about reciprocal relationships: What can museums give back to the communities they work with?

Sonya Kelliher-Combs installing work at the Alaska State Museum (2023), Photo by Ellen Carrlee

Museum Collections as Teachers for the Future Generations
by Lilly Hope

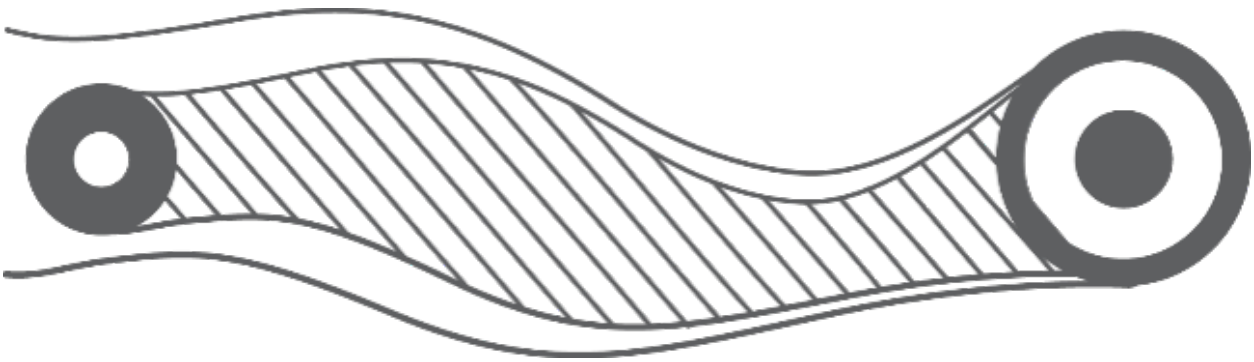
Lily Hope in her weaving studio (2023). Photo by Syndy Agaki

Museums hold objects that we do not always have access to have in our communities. We cannot just call up our neighbors and ask to see a Chilkat blanket, because most of them are not in peoples' homes. With museums, we have access to objects of that can educate us and teach us historical techniques. The most meaningful part of working with museum collections is for community members to continue to learn from pieces that we have not seen in a while.

When I think of the robes that I make for museum collections, I think of a word that my mom used. She used the word 'incubating.' When I was in the Portland Art Museum, someone asked me, 'How are you ok with making this art that is supposed to be used in ceremony, knowing that once it goes into a museum collection it may or may not be danced again?" Thankfully my mother was still alive and I asked her what she thought. My mom explained to me that the robes will be around far longer than the museums will be around. They will become pieces that future generations will want to study. 'Your robe is breathing and developing,' she said. 'Some of us are born to be teachers and with your robe, you are incubating a baby that has been

brought into a museum. It will be a teacher for this part of its life. Then maybe it will come home again." That was reassuring for me. I am allowed to make work for museums because I am creating teachers which will be there for others to study. A museum is a great place for my robes, these future teachers, to be.

When I think about how museums can do better to serve Alaska Native people, I want museums to consider that relationships matter. Museums have the opportunity to build relationships. They can hold space for community members. They can give us access. They can involve us. Ask us how to repair our cultural belongings. Ask us what we would do if these beings were not held in a collection. Ask us to be the experts in our own work. Hold spaces for relationships to happen between community members and museum staff. Let the community members come in and share our knowledge and ideas. Have a cultural consultant on staff, ideally someone of the place who has a little culture and knowledge that museum staff may not necessarily know about. Show up.



Excerpted from "My mind is with the weather" by Tanya Lukin Linklater, PhD[2]

In 2019, I visited the British Museum in London. A series of recognitions in quick succession as peoples and histories from across North America collided, condensed in a side gallery installed on top of one another. Immobile behind plexiglass. In this cacophony of objects, histories, and spirit I recognized a Sugpiaq mask alongside rain gut parkas from the Aleutian Chain. When I encountered the mask, it felt familiar in form. I recognized its contours, surface, color. The text accompanying it proposed Kodiak as the provenance. Yet, the mask felt simultaneously unfamiliar, far from home. Behind glass, not reachable, only seen. I did not sense energy emanating from the mask, which felt peculiar as masks are highly energetic beings. Did its eyes see me? Did the mask recognize me as Sugpiaq? Was it too tired to look any longer? Was it resting? Was it in an extended slumber? Would it be disrespectful to wake it up? The Unangan rain gut parkas were fashioned in an imperial style, like a Russian coat of the historic era. I recognized them but they also felt unfamiliar. This feeling of unfamiliarity striking in contrast to other moments of recognition I have experienced within collections storage or archival spaces that are mostly invisible yet hide vast accumulations of belongings out of place and stuck in time. The mask is one iteration of this longer duration of museum collection, which signals an archaeological removal from our homelands and peoples. An ethnographic suspension and containment in weather-repellant storage.

When we visit belongings in museum collections storage spaces, we encounter these states of suspension that have locked belongings within colonial time. In this way we must confront colonial time alongside ancestral time in the present moment.

The complexity and entanglement of these experiences with belongings does not diminish my position. If ancestral and cultural belongings are no longer nourished within their previous contexts with Indigenous specialists in ceremony, in the social relations of everyday life in their homelands, in the midst of weather, or felt structures, this does not negate their capacity for awareness, sentience, and agency.[3] While the belongings may be exhausted

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[2] This text is excerpt from a Tanya Lukin Linklater's dissertation *On Felt Structures: Weather, Embodiment and Materiality*, Queen's University (2023).

[3] Felt structures are ephemeral, usually unseen, ever-changing. They unfold in iterative and cumulative ways over time. Invisible, they surround our ancestral or cultural belongings. They affect our minds. They affect us physiologically. They are in constant motion, impermanent, shifting, fading, dense in moments and dissipated in others like cloud cover. Unlike the regularity of storms that move across the continents and follow air currents, the patterns of their arrivals and departures are encoded. We rely on our senses in the processes of perception, discernment, and response to felt structures. Felt structures may also be enacted as a set of ethics that guide our actions in the present moment, as a kindness towards our ancestors and to the world at large—embodied knowledge

from continuous viewing by a public's confused or forceful gaze, or depleted from the isolation within darkened, stale collections storage, they may remember their original contexts. I understand them to be insisting and remembering that which sustains us even as they are denied rest and life.[4]

Indigenous peoples travel far distances to honor, to visit, to be in relation to belongings, and if we believe that they embody awareness or personhood, these visits nourish us with reciprocal exchange. There is also the possibility that they are nourished, sung to, danced from afar by their peoples. Let us not erase or ignore their ongoing energetic exertion, which may have been diminished over time within the museum but still inhabits an animated life.

Tanya Lukin Linklater, An amplification through many minds, 2019. Commission for San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in cooperation with the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology. Courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries.

practices that hold a future potential." Tanya Lukin Linklater, *On felt structures: weather, embodiment, and materiality*, Queen's University, 2023.

[4] Robinson, Dylan. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies,* University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Utilizing Museum Collections for Artistic Research, Cultural Connection and Object Study by Erin Ggaadimtis Ivalu Gingrich

Erin Gingrich in collections at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Museum of the North (2022)

Uvaŋa Erin Ggaadimtis Ivalu Gingrich, I am a Koyukon Athabascan and Inupiaq multidisciplinary artist with focus on carving, mask making, regalia design, beadwork and photography. My work has taken me into many places including museum collections. Museums have always played an important role in my work and provided a connection to material culture.
Outside of rural villages and Indigenous community events, museums offered a place to connect to my Indigenous heritage and to study the material cultural belongings of my ancestors and other Indigenous peoples. I have found over the course of my career that time spent in museum collections offered me valuable connection, study, inspiration, cultural grounding and added depth to my projects.

These are my own perspectives and experiences as an Indigenous artist that I feel are notable for both museums and artists/culture bearers/ Indigenous community members to consider when entering these spaces together and fulfilling the purpose of these collections; to be held in trust for us and our use by us and our community.

Connecting with museums

Connecting and getting oriented with museum collections is a process. My first experiences with museum collections involved space for me to learn about the collections and for me to learn my process when it came to

research. Some of the connections to museums came to me as a student and started me on a path to feel welcome in these institutional spaces.

Funded and supported programs make a difference. A large barrier to accessing museum collections is support, whether that is travel and accommodations, a stipend for time spent in the collections, guidance or companionship while navigating these spaces or materials cost for new work made from research conducted in collections. The work of activating collections is valuable and Indigenous people who do the work should be supported and compensated for their time and efforts to bring new energy into museums.

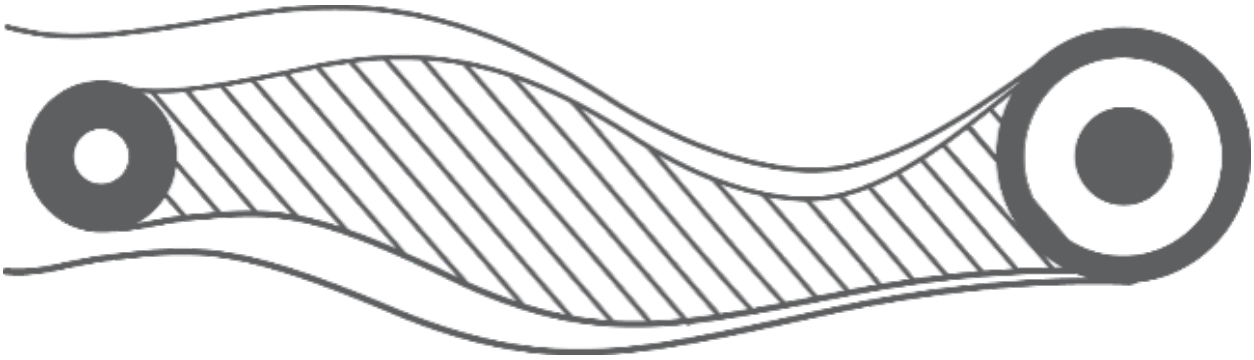
Access matters because many examples of our cultural heritage objects are held behind locked doors. If we look at the demographics of certain museum collections, we would find the percentages of Indigenous cultural objects to be notable. Indigenous peoples are major stakeholders for many museums, but at the same time are among the most underserved. Innovative art works and cultural belongings are often placed deep in collections because they do not fit into a mainstream aesthetic of what Indigenous art should be. Indigenous peoples are major stakeholders for many museums and if Indigenous access to collections is not a priority for these museums, then who are these institutions for?

Cultural protocols and considerations

Cultural protocols and respect are a very valuable area to share and learn from one another. As a multicultural Indigenous person, I bring with me more than one perspective and approach when relating to works and objects. This also means that I have many areas that I have space to learn about as well. Not every Indigenous artist, culture bearer or community member will have the same level of involvement or knowledge base about cultural protocols and some of us will enter these spaces to learn and some to teach. Communication about these areas offer one another an opportunity to connect and lay the groundwork for working together in a good way. There needs to be consideration for sharing certain materials that encompasses sensitive materials, language used in collections and particular cultural objects that may carry with them a taboo or for the Koyukon Athabascan people; *hutłlaanee*. One area that I have assisted a museum in making adjustments was around the use of language in regards to a particular species of bird; the long-tailed duck. Historically this bird was called *Aaqhaaliq* by the Inupiaq peoples, however this bird has formerly been known by a term that is ageist, racist and sexist that is no longer actively used or promoted. However, due to the nature of museum collections, databases and associated data, that former name can still be

found in certain museum collections and connected to certain Indigenous objects. A quick review and edit of the museum collections database was all it took to update the language used and remove a name that should no longer be associated with a beautiful seabird and wild resource that was utilized to make cultural objects.

Museums hold the work of our ancestors for us, and as stakeholders we fulfill the purpose of museum collections when we use them and share space with our cultural belongings. Cultural belongings benefit from our care, and if objects can be returned or be brought closer to home they should. Sovereignty over our culture and past cements us as living and surviving people, it honors what has been created by our ancestors and honors the intent that it was made for our use and our hands.



Repatriations in Alaska by John F. C. Johnson

John Johnson (center) with Chugach delegation at the Berlin Ethnographic Museum (2019), photograph courtesy John Johnson

I proudly serve as the vice president of cultural resources for the Chugach Alaska Corporation, an Alaska Native regional organization created under the Alaska Native Claim Settlement Act (ANCSA). The Chugach region extends from Lower Cook Inlet to Prince William Sound onward to Icy Bay along the Pacific Ocean. My family is from the fishing town of Cordova and the Suqpiaq village of Nuchek in Prince William Sound.

For six years, I was a member of the NAGPRA Review Committee for the Smithsonian Institute's, National Museum of Natural History. In this position we reviewed requests from tribes for the repatriation of human remains and cultural property. Alaska has some 235 federal recognized tribes.

During the last 40 years, I have been documenting our Chugach, Eyak and Tlingit historical sites that were selected under ANCSA. Many times, during our field surveys we would find empty burial caves with only a few scattered bones. They were looted in the name of science and greed!

Our Elders strongly wanted to correct the wrongs from the past and bring our ancestors back home from museums to their place of origin with: Dignity, Honor and Respect. If different organizations, countries, and museums held these values than our world would be a much better place.

Further research of the empty caves led me to the collections at museums and universities in Washington DC, Pennsylvania, California, Connecticut, Washington, and Alaska. My inquiries also included international trips to view collections in Germany, England, Russia, Spain, Finland, and Denmark. Funerary objects and sacred cultural material were returned from Germany and France. Chugach human remains (not funerary items) were returned from the Danish Museum. We continue our request with Denmark on the return of funerary items. The NAGPRA does not apply outside of the United States.

In 1990, I attended an international repatriation conference in Cape Town, South Africa where I talked of individuals who removed our ancestors remains during the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill cleanup.

During the cleanup operation, workers did more than clean crude oil off the beaches, some took the liberty of taking prehistoric human remains. Alaska State Troopers were called and arrived at a burial cave and removed the remains for observation in their crime laboratory in Anchorage. Then we learned that another individual who removed human remains brought them to a University in Anchorage to show his fellow students. How are we going to learn from the mistakes of the past and work together for a better future?

Here are some suggestions:

- All parties must approach this task with an open mind, courtesy towards each other, patience, forgiveness, and kindness.
- Education on the proper treatment and respect of our ancestors needs to continue. No humans young or old, historic, or prehistoric deserves to be placed in a box in the attic or in a public display case (Smithsonian) or in a 55-gallon barrel in a basement (California).
- Efforts need to continue to teach law enforcement officers how to identify prehistoric remains and not a crime scene.
- State, federal, and local organizations need to be aware of the Native American policies on the discovery of human remains.
- Consultation is the key to working together and solving issues before they become problems.
- Meaningful collaboration between Native Americans and institutions will lead to a greater understanding of the culture we all want to save and protect and let grow.

What good is it to preserve cultural material if we let the living culture in front of us die? Our 28 plus years of running the Nuchek Spirit Camp at an

old village site shows how the old and the new can still make something beautiful and meaningful for the next generations.

The Berlin Ethnological Museum is a prime example of a relationship we have and are building. In 2015, Germany made history by being one of the very few countries to openly embrace the repatriation of Native Americans remains and funerary objects. They were not forced to do it, but they did it out of the kindness of their heart and the healing it will bring for the future. Museum officials stated that since the artifacts were taken from the Chugach people without their approval, they do not belong to the museum.

Efforts are underway with Berlin to digitalize artifacts so that they can be used in the villages for educational programs. Artifacts could also be displayed at local tribal museum or cultural center. A cultural exchange of students between our countries is also in the planning stages.

I would like of think of repatriation as a way to heal the wounds from the past and develop better relationships for the future so that traditional knowledge is not lost. Many museums have feared that repatriation of cultural items was a loss of knowledge and the end of their world. However, it became clear that these actions resulted in greater understanding of the objects and a better working relationship with cultures that they are trying to preserve.

One major effort that still needs to be addressed is putting to rest all the Unidentifiable and Unclaimed human remains in Alaska. Regional burial plots are better than being lost in a box with no way home.

Suggested Steps, Protocols, and Searchable Terms for Ahtna Communities when Visiting with Cultural Belongings in Museums and Institutions by Melissa Shaginoff

From Left and clockwise: Dimi Macheras, Dawn Biddison, Melissa Shaginoff, Kiana Carlson Agnes Denny at the Smithsonian Institution (2023)

This is a working document from the 2023 project "Coming Home: Reclaiming Ahtna knowledge through Museum Collections." It is informed by the experiences and discussions with Ahtna leaders and culture bearers Anges Denny, Jessica Denny, Dimi Machares, Kiana Carlson, and Melissa Shaginoff. It is also informed by the knowledge and experience of Dawn Biddison of Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center. It is specifically written for the research of an Ahtna cultural group. Utilize and adjust according to your cultural group(s) to make your collection visit the most informative, efficient, and meaningful.

Care for oneself

When visiting collections be aware of your body, take frequent breaks, and bring grounding/ceremonial items with you (sage, devil's club, and or volcanic rocks). Inform staff ahead of your visit about what is needed to accommodate ceremonial needs, so that they can better understand how to

be good hosts. Some staff may not yet be aware of ceremonial protocols and sharing these steps will help build better relationships and better experiences for you, your group, and the Ahtna people that come after your visit.

Bring others

Unless you need dedicated time alone, sharing the experience with other Ahtna people can be very helpful. Not only because of the cultural knowledge one might share but because of the emotional and physical toll it might take. Oftentimes, the cultural belongings have waited years for relatives to visit. The experience can be draining and overwhelming, having people with you experiencing the same feeling can be affirming and healing. If you bring an Elder, make sure they have a companion with them. Build in time for free days in between collections visits. Look for a place to smudge, steam, and rest in processing your experiences together. Also, remember to request break times away from staff each day during a collections visit.

Contact ahead of visit

If you want to visit collections at museums and other institutions, you need to start the process often by contacting people on staff. Most likely the collections, conservation, or curatorial department, depending on the size of the institution. You can usually find this information (phone and email) on the website of the institution. It is best to arrange your visit well in advance in order for staff to prepare – some places have limited resources. It is also helpful to research their online collections or request a list of their collections specific to your research area. This will help you prepare for your visit as well as focus on your specific interests as time is often limited during collections visits. If asked to search their online database or identify searchable terms, it is important to remember that many institutions may still use outdated and/or inappropriate terms for cultural groups and individuals. There may also be misspellings and phonetic spellings of place names or locations. Because of these circumstances, it is best to compile a list including all possible searchable terms.

Remember your power and protection

It is important to be aware that collections and photo archives of Ahtna people may contain text and images that are offensive and dehumanizing. While it is difficult to prepare oneself for this, it is appropriate and reasonable to request content warnings be added to such collections and photo archives. This is the power and protection we can provide in solidarity and sovereignty over our cultural belongings and the representations of ourselves. Content warnings by no means heal or erase the offensive

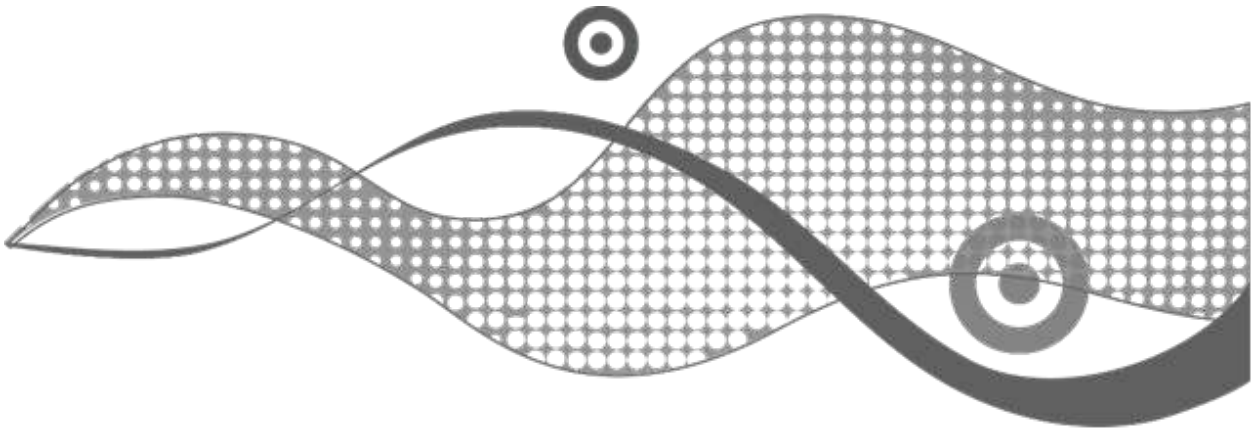
language and imagery used, but they provide preparation for more Ahtna people to work within these spaces.

Ask questions

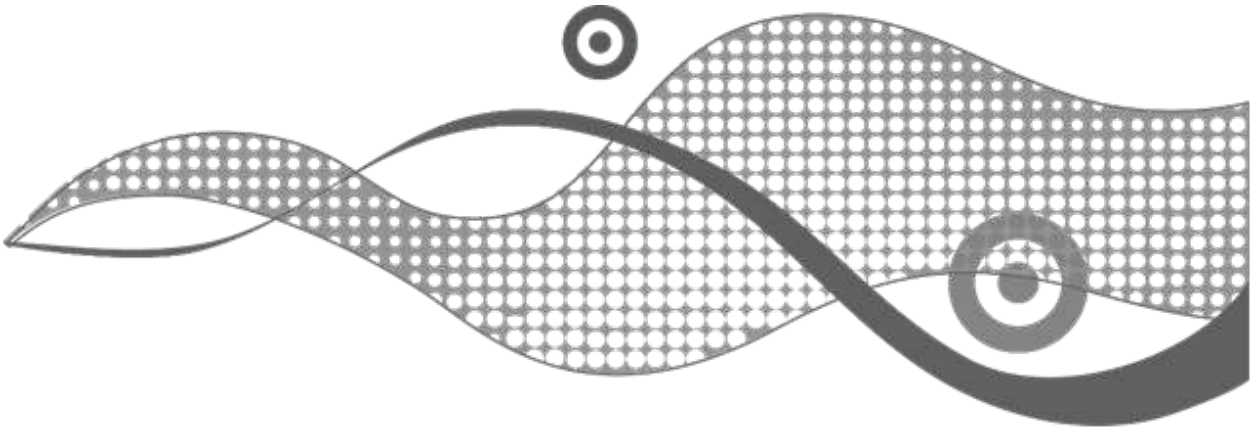
While the road to healing from extractive institution practices is long, we are resilient. Let's use the institutional playbook to deconstruct the "care" for cultural belongings. How do we want these items to live, to teach us, and to return to land when they are done? Consider with your family and community if you want a place to view your cultural belongings. Is it within a museum, a cultural center, or a trusted family member's home? Does keeping cultural belongings benefit future generations? Here is some information to consider when gatherings and or inventorying your family's cultural belongings.

Gathering and inventorying questions:

- What is the item?
- What is it used for? Is it still used today?
- What materials is it made of?
- How was it made?
- Do you know anyone in the past and/or currently who makes this item?
- Do you have any memories of this item?
- How did this item come to you?
- How is this item disposed of/returned to land?



Note these are only suggested steps, protocols, and searchable terms. They are subject to change. It is information guided by individuals with their own experiences and perspectives within and on museums and institutions. Please utilize when helpful and veer away when not. Take care relatives.



Sacred Tlingit At.oow in Museums and the Care of Shaman and Sacred Materials in Museum Collections by Judith Daxootsu Ramos

My name is Dax̲ootsú. I am Tlingit, Raven moiety, Kwaashk'í Kwáan clan, and from the house of the Owl from Yakutat, Alaska.

Shaman objects are held in museums and private collections all over the world. They were used in rituals and ceremonies, are sacred objects and considered "at.oow" (clan owed) by the Tlingit people. They require special care and handling by museums.

Tlingit At.óow "Cultural Patrimony"

Tlingit are matrilineal, children are born into their mother's moiety. They lived in twenty geographic territories called *kwáan* (people of). Tom Thornton (2008: p. 44, 46), said "The term *k̲wáan*, derived from the Tlingit verb 'to dwell,' simply marks Tlingit individuals as inhabitants of a certain living space." They belong to either the Yeil (Raven) or Chaak' (Eagle) moiety, and you must marry the opposite moiety. Moieties are divided into clans, and sub-divided into houses.

Tlingit view of "sacred objects" and objects of "cultural patrimony" is based on their concepts of spirt and at.óow, the clan ownership of objects or things. De Laguna (1972) states that the most important possession or representation of the clan is their at.óow or clan emblems or crests:

> "Indeed, these crests are, from the native point of view, the most important feature of the matrilineal sib or lineage, acquired in the remote past by the ancestors and determining the nature and destiny of their descendants. One might almost say that the members of the sib (or

lineage) are the human embodiments of the totemic entities" (De Laguna, 1972:451).

The Dauenhauer's (1993) described At.óow as ""an owned or purchased things." These "things" may include land, geographic features, "heavenly bodies", names, designs, events, stories, songs, images from myths or other things that may be significant to a clan. At.óow was purchased through payment or through a human life. To become at.óow, they have to be validated in front of the opposite moiety at a K̲oo.éex' or potlatch. The story of how the clan acquired the is ritually recited at a K̲oo.éex̲'. Once an object becomes at.óow, it become clan property (cultural patrimony). Clan property cannot be sold, conveyed, or alienated unless the whole clan agrees. Individuals are caretakers and trustees of the property.

Clans crest objects brought out at a ceremony are always "balanced" by an object or the at.oow or object of the opposite moiety. (Alaska State Museum, "Opening the Curtain", 1998)

Collectors or Graverobbers: Museum collections in the United States and world-wide hold the sacred objects, tribal objects and human remains from Native American tribes and were collected during the nineteenth century. An estimate of American Indian human remains in museums from 1988, "the American Association of Museums reported to the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs that 163 museums held 43,306 Native American skeletal remains" (Gulliford, 2000).

How these human remains and objects ending up in museums can be traced back to what historians refer to as "Empire Building". In the United States, vast Native American collections were facilitated by the decimation of Native Americans which "allowed for large numbers of objects, which were mistakenly viewed as ethnographic remnants of dying and disappearing cultures, to be purchased by private museums collectors" (Fine-Dare, pp. 30).

In southeast Alaska collectors found "burial boxes and shaman grave houses, common among Tlingit, … were a rich and inexpensive source for very excellent artifacts" (Cole, p. 308). "Grave robbers" included Captain Fast, and even anthropologist Franz Boas who collected hundreds of skulls and skeletons. Stealing bones from a grave was a "repulsive work" but "someone had to do it" he wrote in 1888" (Cole, p. 308). George T. Emmons, United States was a naval officer stationed in Alaska who visited my village Yakutat during the New York Times Mount St. Elias Expedition in 1884. With fellow officers, they "went out in a canoe and made a great "find" of some boxes in the grave of a medicine man in a retired part of the bay." By 1887, Emmons gathered 1,284 catalogued specimens which he sold to

different museums, "In 1888 and enormous Tlingit collection joined the Powell-Bishop collection. …. gathered in Alaska between 1882 and 1887 by navel lieutenant George T. Emmons" (Cole, p. 85).

NAGPRA

In the 1970's, Native American political activism began voicing their desire for recognition of their issues. Included in discussions was the role of museums in representing Native Americans. The American Indian Religious Freedom Act was signed in to law in 1978. "In the 1980's the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) took on legal representation of "the Indian victims of the grave desecration in Kansans and the massive grave expropriations in Nebraska" (Fine-Dare pp. 100). In 1986, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) adopted a resolution rejecting "federal laws which define Indian and Native burial sites, human remains and grave goods as "archaeological resources" and which permit the continued curation, storage, and display of these sacred materials in museums …". Further they asked for laws to reflect Indian and Native religious and cultural rights to determine their treatment and disposition of these materials" (Fine-Dare pp. 105).

Under United States Law, Native American and Hawaiian human remains and objects are protected under the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). This law was enacted in November of 1990 "to address the rights of lineal descendants, Indian tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations to Native American cultural items, including human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony" (www.nps.gov/nagpra).

Section 2 of NAGPRA defines "Cultural items":

- (C) "sacred objects" which shall mean specific ceremonial objects which are needed by traditional Native American religious leaders for the practice of traditional Native American religions by their present day adherents, and
- (D) "cultural patrimony" which shall mean an object having ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to the Native American group or cultural itself, rather than property owned by an individual Native American, and which, therefore, cannot be alienated, appropriated, or conveyed by any individual regardless of whether or not the individual is a member of the Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization and such object shall have been considered inalienable by such Native American group at the time the object was separated from such group.

Scientific "Interests" vs Native Rights

One example of the challenges Native people faced when repatriating human remains from museums is described by Dr. Gordon Pullar. As President of the Kodiak Area Native Associations (KANA) he became aware of hundreds of skeletons that were excavated from a burial area near Larson Bay, Alaska. He discovered it would not be an easy task to repatriate the remain. In "The Qikertarmiut and The Scientist" (1994) he wrote:

> "At the outset, the Alaska Native peoples of Kodiak Island, including myself, The Larsen Bay repatriation effort seemed like a righteous effort. The controversy was usually framed within the context of the interests of science against the right of indigenous people to bury their dead. … but it was far more complex than that. Different concepts of time, death, and sense of identity were at the core of this emotional issue that would eventually test who could make the most effective use of the American political system. Many of the fundamental differences between indigenous world views and the world views of western industrialized society would be clearly demonstrated before the Larsen Bay case was resolved" (Pullar, 1994).

Gordon Pullar felt the issue of repatriation of human remains "was a simple matter of respect" and to the Larsen Bay people "the mere storage of ancestors' remains in drawers located thousands of miles from their burial place was the height of disrespect" (Pullar, 1994).

The Spiritual World and The Ix̲t Shaman

The Tlingit spiritual world is based on their understanding of and relationship to "spirit". In "*Haa tuwunáagu yís, for healing our spirit: Tlingit oratory*", The Dauenhauer's (1990) said, "Yéik" is one term meaning, "spirit" or spiritual "chant", most commonly referring to the supernatural power(s) or spirit "helpers" called upon by shaman when they were working. K̲wáani refers to the spirit that inhabit things in nature for example "aas k̲wáani" are spirit(s) of the trees and "teet k̲wáani" are spirits (or people) in the waves.
The Ix̲t', a Tlingit shaman could be defined as a religious specialist (Billman, 1970) or "intermediary between men and the forces of nature (De Laguna, 1972). They were trained to deal with supernatural power and had control over "helper" spirits. Some of the functions of shaman include: the curing of diseased; controlling the weather; accompanying and directing war and hunting parties; protecting the community against other shaman; finding lost souls and dealing with witchcraft. Shaman could be male or female, but women could only become shaman after they stopped menstruating. Shaman never cut his/her hair and was easily recognized "with his long mop

of uncombed hair, which was never cut, since it was believed that much of his power lay in it" (Billman, 1970, De Laguna pp. 684).

Shaman acquired his power from his spirit helpers. When a person was becoming a shaman, he would fast and go alone into the forest to seek a spirit helper. He is hoping an animal will appear to him, fall dead, and then the shaman will cut his tongue. "The soul (k̲wáani) of the animal whose tongue is cut becomes the yek (Yéik) of the shaman" (De Laguna pp. 678). The shaman's masks and other objects a shaman possessed represented the animals from which he obtained his power.

Shaman objects used in his work included: masks, rattles, drums, "dance aprons", necklaces of bone pendants, charms, drums, batons, and boxes (Emmons 1991; De Laguna 1971; Wardwell 1996). Billman (1970) mentions some shaman used a special "Shaman's Doll". Some shamans inherited their power and objects from their uncle who trained him. Wardwell (1996) states, the most important objects were the masks that "were worn to represent and to enable the shaman to take on the powers of the spirit helpers who was being called upon to assist him in his duties" and "Each Tlingit shaman owned his individualized set of masks" (Wardwell pp. 109).

Handling and Exhibiting Shamans Equipment

Different authors commented on the special care of shaman objects. Wardwell (1996) said "Contact with the objects by those who did not know how to handle them was dangerous and to be avoided. When not in use, they were kept in boxes either in parts of the shaman's house that were sealed off from visitors or in caches deep in the forest so that the uninitiated would not encounter them". De Laguna (1972) was told some of the spirit or power of the shaman's spirit helper resided in the objects, "If you go around anything that used to belong to "ixt" (shaman) that's qut'awulisi -It gets into somebody,' but the person doesn't know it. It bothers you. … It's his yeik that gets into you – du yegi (his spirit)" (De Laguna pp. 674).

Respectful and Ethical Collaborations with Indigenous People

Recently museums and institutions like the Smithsonian Institution have successfully collaborated with tribes and indigenous peoples. The Smithsonian Institution is not subject to NAGPRA but subject to the repatriation mandates in the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) Act of 1989.

The National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian, published in "*The Changing Presentation of the American Indian, Museums and Naïve*

Cultures" (Smithsonian 2000) papers from a 1995 conference on the ways museums have presented Native Americans and their cultures and how they are changing. One of the authors, Nason says it will be difficult for museum professionals to surrender control, but "without Native collaboration the deepest and most complex meaning of Indian artifacts will be lost." Janice Clement, from Warm Springs, Oregon, said their museum was "the product of community support and commitment", resulted in a grass-roots, community-based institution that stresses Native spirituality and creativity" (Smithsonian, 2000). Avan Maurer in her chapter " Presenting the American Indian: From Europe to America", said "What has changed, …. Is the attitude of museum professionals, who have developed a growing sense of responsibility and respect for American Indian communities, and the involvement of these communities in the process of their own cultural representation".

Kathleen Fine-Dare (2002) said even with NAGPRA, Native people continue to struggle. The return of human remains and objects to Native tribes have become a negotiation, and tribes have to understand the language and rules. Issues tribe have to struggle with under NAGPRA is, even where tribe have had "grave goods" returned, "the return was not unconditional. It came with various pressures and inducements to build a museum and in general to display the goods as they had been … among the dominant society".

Collaboration with American Museum of Natural History

In 2017, the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) began the renovation of their Northwest Coast Hall with the collaboration of representatives of Northwest Coast peoples as co-curators. One of the outcomes is protocols for the handling, treatment and storage of sacred objects referred to as "Objects of Power" or objects used in association with traditional/spiritual healers' practice, sacred ceremonies, or warfare.
Other guidelines Museums and Indigenous Groups can review include: The Alutiiq Museum Guidelines for the Spiritual Care of Objects (Haakanson, Jr. and Steffian); the Association of Art Museum Directors, Report on the Stewardship and Acquisition of Sacred Objects; and The Great North Museum Hancock, Policy for the Care of Culturally Restricted Objects;
United Nations – Human Rights – Indigenous Rights
The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is an international instrument adopted by the United Nation in 2008).

Important Articles include:

- Article 5 states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and

cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State"

- Article 8. 1. "Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture."
- Article 11. 1. Indigenous people have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural tradition and customs. The includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature."
- Article 12.1. "Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the tuse and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains."
- Article 12.2. "States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous people concerned"
- Article 18. "Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their right, through representative chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions."

Conclusion: The impact and history of Native American and Hawaiian human remains, and objects in Museums impacted how people view Native Americans as "relics of the past, or vanishing culture. Too many Native American human remains are still present in museum and institutional collections around the world. Native people under NAGPRA have had some remains, items of "cultural patrimony" and sacred objects returned to the tribe. Today there are successful collaborations with tribes on how Native people are portrayed and presented in museums. Tribally controlled museums like the Alutiiq Museum and the Warm Spring Museums, have more control over their collections and displays. Major museums like the American Museum of Natural History now collaborate with Tribes on their displays.

Contributors and Museum Sovereignty advisory circle members

Aandaxjoon (Tlingit), whose English name is Sabena Allen, is a Gaanaxteidí Raven and a child of the Kaagwaantaan clan. Originally from Sitka, Alaska, she received her undergraduate degree in Native American Studies at Dartmouth College. She is now a PhD candidate in Anthropology at The University of Chicago. Her research focuses on climate change and Tlingit oral history. Specifically, she considers the long history of catastrophe in southeast Alaska and the way traditional knowledge found in oral history influences current responses to climate change.

Da<u>x</u>ootsu | Judith Ramos is Tlingit from Yakutat, Alaska, from the Raven moiety, Kwáashk'i<u>k</u>wáan clan. She is Assistant Professor, Northwest Coast Arts at the University of Alaska Southeast and former Assistant Professor in the Department of Alaska Native Studies and Rural Development, UAF. She was a co-curator for the Northwest Coast Hall at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. She is a co-chair of the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council. Her publications include: Ramos, J. (2020). Tlingit Hunting along the Edge: Ice Floe Harbor Seal Hunting in Yakutat Bay, Alaska., A. Crowell (ED.), *Arctic crashes:*

People and animals in the changing north. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Scholarly Press; "This is Kuxaankutaan's (Dr. Frederica de Laguna's) Song" with Elaine Abraham; and "Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Tlingit People Concerning the Sockeye Salmon Fishery of the Dry Bay Area" with Rachel Mason.

Brandon Castle is the Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) Librarian at the W.E.B. Du Bois Library at UMass Amherst. He is interested in the intersections of library and information science, Indigenous sovereignty, and opportunities to build greater awareness of movements related to cultural revitalization and the return of knowledge to communities held within museum, archive, and library collections. He recently graduated with a Master in Library and Information Science (MLIS) with a certificate in digital asset management from San Jose State University. Brandon has previously worked at the Totem Heritage Center as a tour guide and exhibition intern. Brandon is an enrolled member of the Ketchikan Indian Community (KIC) in Ketchikan, Alaska.

Erin Ggaadimits Ivalu Gingrich is a Koyukon Denaa and Iñupiaq carver, interdisciplinary artist and researcher working and subsisting in South-Central Alaska on Dena'ina homelands. Honoring her arctic and subarctic ancestral homelands, Ivalu's work represents what has tied her and her ancestors to the North. Through carved, painted, and beaded sculpture and mask forms, Ivalu creates representations of the revered wild relatives that have provided for her, her family, and her ancestors since time immemorial.

Sven Haakanson (Alutiiq) is a leader in the documentation, preservation, and revival of indigenous culture. Originally from Old Harbor, Dr. Haakanson was the Executive Director of the Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository (2000-2013 Kodiak, AK), and joined the University of Washington as an associate professor of Anthropology and curator of Native American collections at the Burke Museum in 2013.

Lily Hope was born and raised in Juneau, Alaska. She is Tlingit, of the Raven moiety. Following her matrilineal line, she's of her grandmother's clan, the T'akdeintaan. Hope is constantly looking for ways to collaborate with other artists, often spearheading multi-community volunteer weaver projects, Weaving Our Pride (see full link above) youth mentorship projects, the community robe titled the Giving Strength Robe to be worn by survivors of sexual and domestic violence.

Nadia Jackinsky-Sethi is an art historian, author and museum consultant based in Kachemak Bay region of Alaska. Nadia completed her PhD from the University of Washington in 2012. She served as a program director at The CIRI Foundation between 2013 and 2024, and currently works as a research affiliate for York University's "Curating Indigenous Circumpolar Cultural Sovereignty" project.

Emily Johnson (Yup'ik) is an artist who makes body-based work. She is a land and water protector and an organizer for justice, sovereignty and well-being. She is based in Lenapehoking/New York City.

John Johnson is the Vice President at the Chugach Alaska Corporation. He has over 40 years of experience helping Chugach reclaim historical sites and artifacts, and serves as a global ambassador for the Chugach people. In his spare time, John likes to plan and design improvements for Nuuciq Spirit Camp, which he established and developed over the last 25 years.

Sonya Kelliher-Combs is an artist of Iñupiaq from the North Slope of Alaska, Athabascan from Interior Alaska, German, and Irish descent. Kelliher-Combs strives to create work through a contemporary lens that addresses the importance of traditional knowledge. Her experience with traditional women's work has taught her to appreciate the intimacy of intergenerational knowledge and material histories. She draws from historical, familial, and cultural symbolism to form imagery that speaks about abuse, marginalization and the historical and contemporary struggles of Indigenous peoples.

Aaron Leggett (Dena'ina Athabascan) is currently the Senior Curator of Alaska History and Indigenous Cultures, the President of the Native Village of Eklutna, and serves as an advisor the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center, and has served on the boards of the Cook Inlet Historical Society, Alaska Historical Society, and the Alaska State Museums Collections Committee.

Tanya Lukin Linklater creates performances, works for camera, sculptures, and writings that cite Indigenous dance and visual art lineages, our structures of sustenance, and weather. She undertakes embodied inquiry and rehearsal in relation to scores and ancestral belongings in museums and elsewhere alongside dance artists, composers, and poets. Her work reckons with histories that affect Indigenous peoples' lived experiences, (home)lands, and ideas. Tanya studied at University of Alberta (M.Ed.) and Stanford University (A.B. Honours). She received her PhD in Cultural Studies at Queen's University 2023. Her Alutiiq/Sugpiaq homelands are in southwestern Alaska. She is a member of the Native Villages of Afognak and Port Lions and lives and works in Nbisiing Anishnaabeg aki.

Melissa Shaginoff is Ahtna and Paiute from Nay'dini'aa Na Kayax (Chickaloon Village, AK). She is an artist, a social activist, a writer, and a curator. Melissa's work is shaped by the framework and intricacies of her Indigenous ceremonies and social structures. She utilizes visiting in her art practice, searching for deeper understanding through moments of exchange and reciprocity. She is currently the Assistant Curator at the Alaska Native Heritage Center.

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