



## Museums Alaska - Alaska Art Fund 2022

Alutiiq Heritage Foundation (Alutiiq Museum & Archaeological Repository)

### Application

Primary Contact:

Phone:

Email:

## Narrative

Please answer the following questions to show the panel that your organization:

- Uses an unbiased, collaborative method of choosing or commissioning new pieces for your collection,
- Has a clear understanding on how the artwork will fit into and improve your collection and educational goals,
- Has done research into and feels that the price of the piece is fair, and
- Has a clear plan for how the artwork will be cared for and shared with the public.

TIP: Click on the question marks next to each section for guiding questions.

### **Briefly describe the artwork your organization would like to purchase.**

*(1500 character limit)*



The Alutiiq Museum proposes to purchase Kadiak, an oil on canvas painting by Kodiak Alutiiq artist Alvin Eli Amason. This piece is a small example of Amason's work at 21" x 25" and features a portrait of an Alutiiq man from the shoulders up. It is a close, intimate picture of an ancestor. The man looks directly at the viewer and is dressed for hunting. He wears a gut rain jacket and a wooden seal helmet. Alutiiq men carved life-like seal heads from a single piece of wood, crafting a hat designed for camouflage. Some hats were fitted with animal whiskers and many were painted. Men wore these helmets to hunt seals on land—to sneak up on animals sleeping at haul-outs.

The painting is typical of Amason's style, composed of bold brush strokes and bright colors. However, it features a person, an unusual subject for Amason who often paints animals. The inspiration for this piece is personal. The hunter is a composite of five men from Amason's hometown, Old Harbor. He reminds Amason of hunting seals with his grandfather and of his own efforts to learn helmet making. Amason learned to carve seal helmets and wore one of these hats to his wedding. To Amason, the piece conveys a strong sense of home. The name Kadiak, an older term for Kodiak, reflects this connection.

### **Tell us about the artist's background and experience.**

*(1500 character limit)*

Alutiiq artist Alvin Amason is one of Alaska's best-known Native artists. For more than 40 years, his colorful work has been featured in books, displayed in exhibits across the nation, and added to museum and corporate collections. Amason began drawing as a boy. He studied art and painting at Central Washington University, receiving a BA in 1973 and an MA in 1974. In 1976, he earned an MFA from Arizona State University. Amason worked as an instructor at Navajo Community College in Arizona and then as Director of the Native Arts program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. After 17 years at UAF, he retired as a full professor. Today he is an associate professor at UAA and maintains a studio in Anchorage.



## Museums Alaska - Alaska Art Fund 2022

Alutiiq Heritage Foundation (Alutiiq Museum & Archaeological Repository)

### Application

Primary Contact:


Phone:

Email:

Amason's solo shows include exhibitions at the Alaska State Museum, Stonington Gallery, and Decker/Morris Gallery. The Anchorage Museum, Alaska State Museum, Kodiak History Museum, Heard Museum, National Gallery of Fine Arts, Smithsonian, and University of Alaska Museum own pieces of his work. Other works have been purchased by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of the Interior, Providence Hospital, Alaska Contemporary Art Bank, Alaska State Council on the Arts, and ARCO Alaska. He received commissions from the 1% Federal Art in Architecture program for an installation in Anchorage's Federal Building, and from Alaska's 1% for Art program for an installation at the Ted Stevens International Airport. In 1996, he received a Governor's Award for the Arts.

### **Why does your museum want to add this artwork to their collection?**


*(2500 character limit)*

Amason is an Alutiiq tribal member who was born and raised in the rural village of Old Harbor. He grew up slogging through alders, following his grandfather, bear guide Eli Metrokin up mountainsides, and hauling in salmon-filled nets as a deckhand. These experiences made a deep, lasting impression on Amason, and they are the inspiration for his paintings. His work captures Kodiak and is beloved by island residents. Our audience wants to see Amason's work in the museum. 

The museum owns just two other paintings by Amason. Both are large and depicted animals. Kodiak would be a nice addition. It is smaller, depicts a person, and is inspired by Alutiiq community members. There are very few images of Alutiiq people in traditional clothing. Some of the best examples are from a set of watercolors painted in 1817 and owned by a Russian arts organization. These cannot be used without negotiation and a significant fee. Amason's painting of an ancestor offers an alternative. It would give the Alutiiq Museum a way to show an Alutiiq person in a display of ancestral hunting gear. Moreover, it would help us interpret seal helmets. The Alutiiq Museum has a contemporary example of these distinct hats created by Amason's daughter Lena. We also have a photograph of Alvin Amason wearing his daughter's creation. Together Kodiak, Lena's seal helmet, and the photo of Alvin Amason would provide valuable components for a display.

### **How did the artist price their artwork?**

*(1500 character limit)*

This price for Kodiak reflects the demand for Amason's work and his notoriety among Alaskan artists. It is very difficult to purchase a piece of Amason's work. He creates many paintings on commission and sells others rapidly, often within hours of finishing. Amason offered this piece to the Alutiiq Museum because of its personal content. He feels it belongs in Kodiak. He priced Kodiak relative to other recent commissions, considering its size and composition. This is a small composition without the sculpted attachments Amason commonly adds to his paintings. For reference, the Alutiiq Museum purchased Big Sum Bich #2 from Amason in 2016 with support from a Museums Alaska/Rasmuson Foundation art acquisition grant. This 70" x 70" depiction of a bear included a sculpted nose and cost \$15,000. 



## Museums Alaska - Alaska Art Fund 2022

Alutiiq Heritage Foundation (Alutiiq Museum & Archaeological Repository)

### Application

Primary Contact:

Phone:

Email:

#### **What process did your museum use to find and choose this piece?**

*(1500 character limit)*



In February 2022, the Alutiiq Museum issued a call for proposals. We asked living Alaskan artists with recent works tied to our mission to offer pieces for our permanent collection. We posted this call to our website with a link to an online proposal form. The link allowed artists to easily submit a proposal with a photo. We shared the opportunity with an email to a list of active Alutiiq artists, posted it to our multiple social media sites on four occasions, shared it in a March email to ca. 1400 museum supporters, and sent emails to regional Native corporation lists to alert artists. For those with limited computer access, we made paper forms available at the museum, and Curator of Collections Amanda Lancaster assisted several people with completing the paperwork. Artists offered about twenty pieces to the museum. Three staff members reviewed the submissions and chose the pieces that best fit our established collecting priorities and interpretive plans. These pieces included Amason's Kadiak. Finally, we shared the desired pieces with our volunteer collections advisory committee who agreed they were well suited for the permanent collection.

#### **Where will your museum store or display this piece and how will you protect it from the elements?**

*(1500 character limit)*



The Alutiiq Museum is nationally accredited and maintains a secure, climate-controlled collections vault. All works of art are stored in the vault when not on display in the museum gallery, a space that is also climate controlled and carefully secured. Importantly, every piece added to our collection is formally accessioned. Incoming items are documented with a condition report and registration photos, entered in our collections management software, and then individually stored with archival materials.

Amason's painting is an excellent piece for gallery display. When shown it will be wall hung using a secure, double cleat system in an area surveilled by digital cameras. The museum regularly rotates artwork on and off display to protect it from light damage, complete cleaning and condition reporting, and allow objects to rest. The same procedures will be extended to Kadiak.

#### **How will your museum share this piece with the public?**

*(1500 character limit)*

The Alutiiq Museum will distribute a press release announcing the painting's purchase, post the release to our website, and link it to our Facebook page with pictures. We will also add an image of Kadiak to our online art gallery which provides public access to all of our Alaska Art Fund purchases: (<https://alutiiqmuseum.org/explore/collections/types-of-collections/contemporary-art>). Finally, we will share the purchase in an article for our summer newsletter. This publication is mailed to museum members and shared freely via download from our website. It is scheduled for release in late August.

From a broader perspective, Amason's painting will be valuable for interpretation. The Alutiiq Museum is about to undergo a major renovation. Construction will begin this coming winter and take about two years (2023-



## Museums Alaska - Alaska Art Fund 2022

Alutiiq Heritage Foundation (Alutiiq Museum & Archaeological Repository)

### Application

Primary Contact:

Phone:

Email:

2024). During this period, the museum will completely revise its exhibits with the help of multiple community advisory groups. We envision installing Kadiak in a new display on traditional hunting, with a kayak, hunting gear, and Lena Amason's contemporary seal helmet. The painting of an ancestor will add a valuable human image to a display of artifacts, and it will illustrate how a seal helmet was worn.

### **Is there anything else the review committee needs to know about your application?**

*(1500 character limit)*

The Alutiiq Museum does not have a collections acquisition budget. The Alaska Art Fund is our only opportunity to purchase artwork for our collection.

**You must click "Save Work" at the bottom of each page.**